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GRIFFITH GAUNT.

VOL. III.

LONDON PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET  
AND CHARING CROSS,

# GRIFFITH GAUNT;

OR,

## JEALOUSY.

BY CHARLES READE.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. III.

LONDON :

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1866.

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# GRIFFITH GAUNT.



## CHAPTER I.

“DEAR FATHER AND FRIEND,—The words you spoke to me to-day admit but one meaning; you are jealous of my husband.

“Then you must be—how can I write it?—almost in love with me.”

“So then my poor husband was wiser than I. He saw a rival in you: and he has one.

“I am deeply, deeply shocked. I ought to be very angry too; but, thinking of your solitary condition, and all the good you have done to my



soul, my heart has no place for ought but pity. Only, as I am in my senses, and you are not, you must now obey me, as heretofore I have obeyed you. You must seek another sphere of duty without delay.

“These seem harsh words from me to you. You will live to see they are kind ones.

“Write me one line, and no more, to say you will be ruled by me in this.

“God and the saints have you in their holy keeping. So prays your affectionate and

“Sorrowful daughter and true friend,

“CATHERINE GAUNT.”

“Poor soul!” said Griffith. “Said I not that women are not wicked, but weak? Who would think that after this he could get the better of her good resolves—the villain!”

“Now read his reply,” said Father Francis.

“Ay,” said Griffith. “So this is his one word of

reply, is it? three pages closely writ—the villain, oh the villain!”

“Read the villain’s letter,” said Francis, calmly.

The letter was very humble and pathetic; the reply of a good, though erring man, who owned, that in a moment of weakness, he had been betrayed into a feeling inconsistent with his holy profession. He begged his correspondent, however, not to judge him quite so hardly. He reminded her of his solitary life, his natural melancholy, and assured her that all men in his condition had moments when they envied those whose bosoms had partners. “Such a cry of anguish,” said he, “was once rung from a maiden queen, maugre all her pride. The Queen of Scots hath a son; and I am but a barren stock.” He went on to say that prayer and vigilance united do much. “Do not despair so soon of me. Flight is not cure: let me rather stay and, with God’s help and the saints’, overcome this unhappy weakness. If I

fail, it will indeed be time for me to go and never again see the angelic face of my daughter and my benefactress."

Griffith laid down the letter. He was somewhat softened by it ; and said, gently, " I cannot understand it. This is not the letter of a thorough bad man neither."

"No," said Father Francis, coldly, "'tis the letter of a self-deceiver : and there is no more dangerous man, to himself and others, than your self-deceiver. But now let us see whether he can throw dust in her eyes, as well as his own." And he handed him Kate's reply.

The first word of it was, " You deceive yourself." The writer then insisted, quietly, that he owed it to himself, to her, and to her husband, whose happiness he was destroying, to leave the place at her request.

"Either you must go, or I," said she : "and pray let it be you. Also this place is unworthy of your

high gifts: and I love you, in my way, the way I mean to love you when we meet again—in Heaven; and I labour your advancement to a sphere more worthy of you.”

I wish space permitted me to lay the whole correspondence before the reader; but I must confine myself to its general purport.

It proceeded in this way: the priest, humble, eloquent, pathetic; but gently, yet pertinaciously, clinging to the place: the lady, gentle, wise, and firm, detaching with her soft fingers, first one hand, then another, of the poor priest's, till at last he was driven to the sorry excuse that he had no money to travel with, nor place to go to.

“I can't understand it,” said Griffith. “Are these letters all forged, or are there two Kate Gaunts? the one that wrote these prudent letters, and the one I caught upon this very priest's arm. Perdition!”

Mrs. Gaunt started to her feet. “Methinks

'tis time for me to leave the room," said she, scarlet.

"Gently, my good friends ; one thing at a time," said Francis. "Sit thou down, impetuous. The letters, sir, what think you of them ?"

"I see no harm in them," said Griffith.

"No harm ! is that all ? But I say these are very remarkable letters, sir : and they show us that a woman may be innocent and unsuspicious, and so seem foolish, yet may be wise for all that. In her early communication with Leonard

‘ ——— at Wisdom’s gate Suspicion slept ;  
And thought no ill where no ill seemed.’

But, you see, suspicion being once aroused, wisdom was not to be lulled nor blinded. But that is not all : these letters breathe a spirit of Christian charity ; of true, and rare, and exalted piety ; tender are they, without passion ; wise, yet not cold ; full of conjugal love, and of filial pity for an erring father, whom she leads, for his

good, with firm yet dutiful hand. Trust to my great experience: doubt the chastity of snow rather than hers who could write these pure and exquisite lines. My good friend, you heard me rebuke and sneer at this poor lady, for being too innocent and unsuspicious of man's frailty: now hear me own to you that I could no more have written these angelic letters, than a barn-door fowl could soar to the mansions of the saints in heaven."

This unexpected tribute took Mrs. Gaunt's heart by storm; she threw her arms round Father Francis's neck, and wept upon his shoulder.

"Ah!" she sobbed, "you are the only one left that loves me."

She could not understand justice praising her: it must be love.

"Ay," said Griffith, in a broken voice, "she writes like an angel: she speaks like an angel: she looks like an angel. My heart says she is

an angel. But my eyes have shown me she is naught. I left her, unable to walk, by her way of it; I came back, and found her on that priest's arm, springing along, like a greyhound." He buried his head in his hands, and groaned aloud.

Francis turned to Mrs. Gaunt, and said, a little severely, "How do you account for that?"

"I'll tell *you*, Father," said Kate, because you love me. I do not speak to *you*, sir: for you never loved me."

"I could give thee the lie," said Griffith, in a trembling voice; "but 'tis not worth while. Know, sir, that within twenty-four hours after I caught her with that villain, I lay a dying for her sake; and lost my wits; and, when I came to, they were a making my shroud in the very room where I lay. No matter; no matter; I never loved her."

"Alas! poor soul!" sighed Kate: "would I



had died ere I brought thee to that!" And, with this, they both began to cry at the same moment.

"Ay, poor fools," said Father Francis, softly; "neither of ye loved t'other; that is plain. So now sit you there, and let us have your explanation; for you must own appearances are strong against you."

Mrs. Gaunt drew her stool to Francis's knee, and addressing herself to him alone, explained as follows:—

"I saw Father Leonard was giving way, and only wanted one good push, after a manner. Well, you know I had got him, by my friends, a good place in Ireland: and I had money by me for his journey; so, when my husband talked of going to the fair, I thought, 'Oh if I could but get this settled to his mind before he comes back.' So I wrote a line to Leonard. You can read it if you like. 'Tis dated the 30th of September, I suppose."

“I will,” said Francis: and read this out:—

“DEAR FATHER AND FRIEND,— You have fought the good fight, and conquered. Now, therefore, I *will* see you once more, and thank you for my husband (he is so unhappy), and put the money for your journey into your hand myself; your journey to Ireland. You are the Duke of Leinster’s chaplain; for I have accepted that place for you. Let me see you to-morrow in the Grove, for a few minutes, at high noon. God bless you.

“CATHERINE GAUNT.”

“Well, father,” said Mrs. Gaunt, “’tis true that I could only walk two or three times across the room. But, alack, you know what women are; excitement gives us strength. With thinking that our unhappiness was at an end; that, when he should come back from the fair, I should fling my arm round his neck, and tell him I had

removed the cause of his misery, and so of mine, I seemed to have wings; and I did walk with Leonard, and talked with rapture of the good he was to do in Ireland, and how he was to be a mitred abbot one day (for he is a great man), and poor little me be proud of him; and how we were all to be happy together in heaven, where is no marrying nor giving in marriage. This was our discourse; and I was just putting the purse into his hands, and bidding him God-speed, when he—for whom I fought against my woman's nature, and took this trying task upon me—broke in upon us, with a face of a fiend; trampled on the poor good priest, that deserved veneration and consolation from him, of all men; and raised his hand to me; and was not man enough to kill me after all; but called me—ask him what he called me—see if he dares to say it again before you; and then ran away, like a coward as he is, from the lady he had defiled with his rude tongue, and

the heart he had broken. Forgive him? that I never will; never; never."

"Who asked you to forgive him?" said the shrewd priest. "Your own heart. Come, look at him."

"Not I," said she, irresolutely. Then, still more feebly: "He is nought to me." And so stole a look at him.

Griffith, pale as ashes, had his hand on his brow, and his eyes were fixed with horror and remorse.

"Something tells me she has spoken the truth," he said, in a quavering voice. Then, with concentrated horror, "But if so—oh God, what have I done?—What shall I do?"

Mrs. Gaunt extended her arms towards him, across the priest.

"Why, fall at thy wife's knees, and ask her to forgive thee."

Griffith obeyed: he fell on his knees, and Mrs. Gaunt leaned her head on Francis's shoulder, and

gave her hand across him to her remorse-stricken husband.

Neither spoke, nor desired to speak; and even Father Francis sat silent and enjoyed that sweet glow which sometimes blesses the peacemaker, even in this world of wrangles and jars.

But the good soul had ridden hard, and the neglected meats emitted savoury odours, and by-and-by he said, drily, "I wonder whether that fat pullet tastes as well as it smells: can you tell me, Squire?"

"Oh, inhospitable wretch that I am," said Mrs. Gaunt: "I thought but of my own heart."

"And forgot the stomach of your unspiritual father. But, madam, you are pale, you tremble."

"'Tis nothing, sir: I shall soon be better. Sit you down and sup: I will return anon."

She retired, not to make a fuss; but her heart palpitated violently, and she had to sit down on the stairs.

Ryder, who was prowling about, found her there, and fetched her hartshorn.

Mrs. Gaunt got better ; but felt so languid and also hysterical, that she retired to her own room for the night, attended by the faithful Ryder, to whom she confided that a reconciliation had taken place, and, to celebrate it, gave her a dress she had only worn a year. This does not sound queenly to you ladies ; but know that a week's wear tells far more on the flimsy trash you wear now-a-days, than a year did on the glorious silks of Lyons Mrs. Gaunt put on ; thick as broad-cloth, and embroidered so cunningly by the loom, that it would pass for rarest needle-work. Besides, in those days, silk was silk.

As Ryder left her, she asked, "Where is the master to lie to-night?"

Mrs. Gaunt was not pleased at this question being put to her. Being a singular mixture of frankness and finesse, she had retired to her own

room partly to test Griffith's heart. If he was as sincere as she was, he would not be content with a *public* reconciliation.

But the question being put to her plump, and by one of her own sex, she coloured faintly, and said, "Why, is there not a bed in his room?"

"Oh yes, madam."

"Then see it be well aired. Put down all the things before the fire; and then tell me; I'll come and see. The feather bed, mind, as well as the sheets and blankets."

Ryder executed all this with zeal. She did more: though Griffith and Francis sat up very late, she sat up too; and, on the gentlemen leaving the supper-room, she met them both, with bed-candles, in a delightful cap, and undertook, with cordial smiles, to show them both their chambers.

"Tread softly on the landing, an if it please you, gentlemen. My mistress hath been unwell;



but she is in a fine sleep now, by the blessing, and I would not have her disturbed."

Father Francis went to bed thoughtful. There was something about Griffith he did not like : the man every now and then broke out into boisterous raptures ; and presently relapsed into moody thoughtfulness. Francis almost feared that his cure was only temporary.

In the morning, before he left, he drew Mrs. Gaunt aside, and told her his misgivings. She replied that she thought she knew what was amiss, and would soon set that right.

Griffith tossed and turned in his bed, and spent a stormy night. His mind was in a confused whirl, and his heart distracted. The wife he had loved so tenderly, proved to be the very reverse of all he had lately thought her ! She was pure as snow, and had always loved him ; loved him now, and only wanted a good excuse to take him

to her arms again. But Mercy Vint!—his wife, his benefactress! a woman as chaste as Kate, as strict in life and morals—what was to become of her? How could he tell her she was not his wife? how to reveal to her her own calamity, and his treason? And, on the other hand, desert her without a word! and leave her hoping, fearing, pining, all her life! Affection, humanity, gratitude, alike forbade it.

He came down in the morning, pale for him, and worn with the inward struggle.

Naturally there was a restraint between him and Mrs. Gaunt; and only short sentences passed between them.

He saw the peacemaker off, and then wandered all over the premises, and the past came nearer, and the present seemed to retire into the background.

He wandered about like one in a dream; and was so self-absorbed, that he did not see

Mrs. Gaunt coming towards him with observant eyes.

She met him full ; he started like a guilty thing.

“Are you afraid of me ?” said she, sweetly.

“No, my dear, not exactly ; and yet I am : afraid, or ashamed, or both.”

“You need not. I said I forgive you ; and you know I am not one that does things by halves.”

“You are an angel !” said he, warmly ; “but (suddenly relapsing into despondency) we shall never be happy together again.”

She sighed. “Say not so. Time and sweet recollections may heal even this wound by degrees.”

“God grant it,” said he, despairingly.

“And, though we can’t be lovers again all at once, we may be friends ; to begin, tell me, what have you on your mind ? Come, make a friend of me.”

He looked at her in alarm.

She smiled. “Shall I guess ?” said she.

“You will never guess,” said he ; “and I shall never have the heart to tell you.”

“Let me try. Well, I think you have run in debt, and are afraid to ask me for the money.”

Griffith was greatly relieved by this conjecture ; he drew a long breath : and, after a pause, said, cunningly, “What made you think that?”

“Because you came here for money, and not for happiness. You told me so in the Grove.”

“That is true. What a sordid wretch you must think me?”

“No, because you were under a delusion. But I do believe you are just the man to turn reckless, when you thought me false, and go drinking and dicing.” She added, eagerly, “I do not suspect you of anything worse.”

He assured her that was not the way of it.

“Then tell me the way of it. You must not think, because I pester you not with questions, I have no curiosity. Oh, how often have I longed

to be a bird, and watch you day and night unseen. How would you have liked that? I wish you had been one, to watch me. Ah, you don't answer. Could you have borne so close an inspection, sir?"

Griffith shuddered at the idea; and his eyes fell before the full grey orbs of his wife.

"Well, never mind," said she, "tell me your story."

"Well, then, when I left you I was raving mad."

"That is true, I'll be sworn."

"I let my horse go; and he took me near a hundred miles from here, and stopped at—at—a farmhouse. The good people took me in."

"God bless them for it. I'll ride and thank them."

"Nay, nay; 'tis too far. There I fell sick of a fever, a brain-fever: the doctor blooded me."

"Alas! would he had taken mine instead."

"And I lost my wits for several days; and

when I came back I was weak as water, and given up by the doctor: and the first thing I saw, was an old hag set a making of my shroud."

Here the narrative was interrupted a moment by Mrs. Gaunt seizing him convulsively, and then holding him tenderly, as if he was even now about to be taken from her.

"The good people nursed me, and so did their daughter, and I came back from the grave. I took an inn; but I gave up that, and had to pay forfeit; and so my money all went; but they kept me on. To be sure I helped on the farm: they kept a hostelry as well. By-and-by came that murrain among the cattle. Did you have it in these parts too?"

"I know not; nor care. Prithee, leave cattle, and talk of thyself."

"Well, in a word, they were ruined, and going to be sold up. I could not bear that: I became bondsman for the old man. It was the least I

could do. Kate, they had saved thy husband's life."

"Not a word more, Griffith. How much stand you pledged for?"

"A large sum."

"Would five hundred pounds be of any avail?"

"Five hundred pounds! Ay, that it would, and to spare; but where can I get so much money? And the time so short."

"Give me thy hand, and come with me," said Mrs. Gaunt, ardently.

She took his hand, and made a swift rush across the lawn. It was not exactly running, nor walking, but some grand motion she had when excited. She put him to his stride to keep up with her at all; and in two minutes she had him into her boudoir. She unlocked a bureau, all in a hurry, and took out a bag of gold. "There!" she cried, thrusting it into his hand, and blooming all over with joy and eagerness: "I thought you

would want money ; so I saved it up. You shall not be in debt a day longer. Now mount thy horse, and carry it to those good souls : only, for my sake, take the gardener with thee—I have no groom now but he—and both well armed.”

“What ! go this very day ?”

“Ay, this very 'hour. I can bear thy absence for a day or two more ; I have borne it so long : but I cannot bear thy plighted word to stand in doubt a day, no not an hour. I am your wife, sir, your true and loving wife ; your honour is mine, and is as dear to me now as it was when you saw me with Father Leonard in the Grove, and read me all awry. Don't wait a moment, begone at once.”

“Nay, nay, if I go to-morrow I shall be in time.”

“Ay, but,” said Mrs. Gaunt, very softly, “I am afraid if I keep you another hour I shall not have the heart to let you go at all : and the sooner



gone, the sooner back for good, please God. There, give me one kiss, to live on, and begone this instant."

He covered her hands with kisses and tears. "I'm not worthy to kiss any higher than thy hand," he said: and so ran sobbing from her.

## CHAPTER II.

HE went straight to the stable, and saddled Black Dick.

But, in the very act, his nature revolted. What, turn his back on her the moment he had got hold of her money, to take to the other. He could not do it.

He went back to her room, and came so suddenly that he caught her crying. He asked her what was the matter.

“Nothing,” said she, with a sigh: “only a woman’s foolish misgivings. I was afraid perhaps you would not come back. Forgive me.”

“No fear of that,” said he. “However, I have

taken a resolve not to go to-day. If I go to-morrow, I shall be just in time; and Dick wants a good day's rest."

Mrs. Gaunt said nothing; but her expressive face was triumphant.

Griffith and she took a walk together; and he, who used to be the more genial of the two, was dull, and she full of animation.

This whole day she laid herself out to bewitch her husband, and put him in high spirits.

It was uphill work; but, when such a woman sets herself in earnest to delight a man, she reads our sex a lesson in the art, that shows us we are all babies at it.

However, it was at supper she finally conquered.

Here the lights, her beauty set off with art, her deepening eyes, her satin skin, her happy excitement, her wit and tenderness, and joyous sprightliness, enveloped Griffith in an atmosphere of

delight, and drove everything out of his head but herself: and with this, if the truth must be told, the sparkling wines co-operated.

Griffith plied the bottle a little too freely. But Mrs. Gaunt, on this one occasion, had not the heart to check him. The more he toasted her, the more uxorious he became, and she could not deny herself even this joy; but, besides, she had less of the prudent wife in her just then, than of the weak indulgent mother. Anything rather than check his love: she was greedy of it.

At last, however, she said to him, "Sweetheart, I shall go to bed: for, I see, if I stay longer, I shall lead thee into a debauch. Be good now: drink no more when I am gone. Else I'll say thou lovest thy bottle more than thy wife."

He promised faithfully. But, when she was gone, modified his pledge by drinking just one bumper to her health: which bumper let in another: and, when at last he retired to rest, he

was in that state of mental confusion wherein the limbs appear to have a memory independent of the mind.

In this condition do some men's hands wind up their watches, the mind taking no appreciable part in the ceremony.

By some such act of what physicians call "organic memory," Griffith's feet carried him to the chamber he had slept in a thousand times, and not into the one Mrs. Ryder had taken him to the night before.

The next morning he came down rather late for him, and found himself treated with a great access of respect by the servants.

His position was no longer doubtful; he was the master of the house.

Mrs. Gaunt followed in due course, and sat at breakfast with him, looking young and blooming as Hebe, and her eye never off him long.

She had lived temperately, and had not yet

passed the age when happiness can restore a woman's beauty and brightness in a single day.

As for him, he was like a man in a heavenly dream: he floated in the past and the present: the recent and the future seemed obscure and distant, and comparatively in a mist.

But that same afternoon, after a most affectionate farewell, and many promises to return as soon as ever he had discharged his obligations, Griffith Gaunt started for the "Packhorse," to carry to Mercy Leicester, alias Vint, the money Catherine Gaunt had saved by self-denial and economy.

And he went south a worse man than he came.

When he left Mercy Leicester, he was a bigamist in law, but not at heart. Kate was dead to him: he had given her up for ever: and was constant and true to his new wife.

But now he was false to Mercy, yet not true to Kate; and, curiously enough, it was a day or two

passed with his lawful wife that had demoralized him. His unlawful wife had hitherto done nothing but improve his character.

But a great fault once committed is often the first link in a chain of acts, that look like crimes, but are, strictly speaking, consequences.

This man, blinded at first by his own foible, and, after that, the sport of circumstances, was single-hearted by nature; and his conscience was not hardened. He desired earnestly to free himself and both his wives from the cruel situation; but, to do this, one of them he saw must be abandoned entirely; and his heart bled for her.

A villain or a fool would have relished the situation; many men would have dallied with it; but, to do this erring man justice, he writhed and sorrowed under it, and sincerely desired to end it.

And this was why he prized Kate's money so.

It enabled him to render a great service to her he had injured worse than he had the other, to her he saw he must abandon.

But this was feeble comfort after all. He rode along a miserable man; none the less wretched and remorseful, that, ere he got into Lancashire, he saw his way clear. This was his resolve: to pay old Vint's debts with Kate's money; take the "Packhorse," get it made over to Mercy; give her the odd two hundred pounds and his jewels, and fly. He would never see her again: but would return home, and get the rest of the two thousand pounds from Kate, and send it Mercy by a friend, who should tell her he was dead, and had left word with his relations to send her all his substance.

At last the "Packhorse" came in sight. He drew rein, and had half a mind to turn back; but, instead of that, he crawled on, and very sick and cold he felt.



Many a man has marched to the scaffold with a less quaking heart than he to the "Pack-horse."

His dejection contrasted strangely with the warm reception he met from everybody there. And the house was full of women; and they seemed, somehow, all cock-a-hoop, and filled with admiration of *him*.

"Where is she?" said he, faintly.

"Hark to the poor soul!" said a gossip. "Dame Vint, where's thy daughter? gone out a-walking belike?"

At this the other women present chuckled and clucked.

"I'll bring you to her," said Mrs. Vint; but prithee be quiet and reasonable; for to be sure she is none too strong."

There was some little preparation, and then Griffith was ushered into Mercy's room, and found her in bed, looking a little pale, but sweeter and

comelier than ever. She had the bedclothes up to her chin.

“You look wan, my poor lass,” said he ; “ what ails ye ?”

“Nought ails me now thou art come,” said she, lovingly.

Griffith put the bag on the table. “There,” said he, “there’s five hundred pounds in gold. I come not to thee empty-handed.”

“Nor I to thee,” said Mercy, with a heavenly smile. “See !”

And she drew down the bedclothes a little, and showed the face of a babe scarcely three days old : a little boy.

She turned in the bed, and tried to hold him up to his father, and said, “Here’s *my* treasure for thee !” And the effort, the flush on her cheek, and the deep light in her dove-like eyes, told plainly that the poor soul thought she had contributed to their domestic wealth some-

thing far richer than Griffith had with his bag of gold.

The father uttered an ejaculation, and came to her side, and, for a moment, Nature overpowered everything else. He kissed the child; he kissed Mercy again and again.

“Now God be praised for both,” said he, passionately; “but most for thee, the best wife, the truest friend——.” Here, thinking of her virtues, and the blow he had come to strike her, he broke down, and was almost choked with emotion; whereupon Mrs. Vint exerted female authority, and bundled him out of the room. “Is that the way to carry on at such a time?” said she. “’Twas enow to upset her altogether. Oh, but you men have little sense in women’s matters. I looked to *you* to give her courage, not to set her off into hysterics after a manner. Nay, keep up her heart, or keep your distance, say I, that am her mother.”

Griffith took this hint, and ever after took pity on Mercy's weak condition ; and, suspending the fatal blow, did all he could to restore her to health and spirits.

Of course, to do that, he must deceive her ; and so his life became a lie.

For, hitherto, she had never looked forward much ; but now her eyes were always diving into futurity : and she lay smiling and discussing the prospects of her boy ; and Griffith had to sit by her side, and see her gnaw the boy's hand, and kiss his feet, and anticipate his brilliant career. He had to look and listen with an aching heart, and assent with feigned warmth, and an inward chill of horror and remorse.

One Drummoud, a travelling artist, called ; and Mercy, who had often refused to sit to him, consented now ; for, she said, when he grows up he shall know how his parents looked in their youth, the very year their darling was born. So

Griffith had to sit with her, and excellent likenesses the man produced; but a horrible one of the child. And Griffith thought,—“Poor soul; a little while and this picture will be all that shall be left to thee of me.”

For all this time he was actually transacting the preliminaries of separation. He got a man of law to make all sure. The farm, the stock, the furniture and goodwill of the “Packhorse,” all these he got assigned to Mercy Leicester for her own use, in consideration of three hundred and fifty pounds, whereof three hundred were devoted to clearing the concern of its debts, the odd fifty was to sweeten the pill to Harry Vint.

When the deed came to be executed, Mercy was surprised, and uttered a gentle remonstrance. “What have I to do with it?” said she. “’Tis thy money, not mine.”

“No matter,” said Griffith; “I choose to have it so.”

“Your will is my law,” said Mercy.

“Besides,” said Griffith, “the old folk will not feel so sore, nor be afraid of being turned out, if it is in thy name.”

“And that is true,” said Mercy. “Now who had thought of that, but my good man?” And she threw her arms lovingly round his neck, and gazed on him adoringly.

But his lion-like eyes avoided her dove-like eyes; and an involuntary shudder ran through him.

The habit of deceiving Mercy led to a consequence he had not anticipated. It tightened the chain that held him. She opened his eyes more and more to her deep affection, and he began to fear she would die if he abandoned her.

And then her present situation was so touching. She had borne him a lovely boy: that must be abandoned too, if he left her; and somehow the

birth of this child had embellished the mother; a delicious pink had taken the place of her rustic bloom; and her beauty was more refined and delicate. So pure, so loving, so fair, so maternal, to wound her heart now, it seemed like stabbing an angel.

One day succeeded to another, and still Griffith had not the heart to carry out his resolve. He temporized; he wrote to Kate that he was detained by the business; and he stayed on and on, strengthening his gratitude and his affection, and weakening his love for the absent, and his resolution; till, at last, he became so distracted and divided in heart, and so demoralized, that he began to give up the idea of abandoning Mercy, and babbled to himself about fate and destiny, and decided that the most merciful course would be to deceive both women. Mercy was patient. Mercy was unsuspicious. She would content herself with occasional visits, if he could only

feign some plausible tale to account for long absences.

Before he got into this mess he was a singularly truthful person ; but now a lie was nothing to him. But, for that matter, many a man has been first made a liar by his connexion with two women ; and by degrees has carried his mendacity into other things.

However, though now blessed with mendacity, he was cursed with a lack of invention ; and sorely puzzled how to live at Hernshaw, yet visit the "Packhorse."

The best thing he could hit upon was to pretend to turn bagman ; and so Mercy would believe he was travelling all over England, when all the time he was quietly living at Hernshaw.

And perhaps these long separations might prepare her heart for a final parting, and so let in his original plan a few years hence.

He prepared this manœuvre with some art :



he told her, one day, he had been to Lancaster, and there fallen in with a friend, who had as good as promised him the place of a commercial traveller for a mercantile house.

“A traveller!” said Mercy. “Heaven forbid! If you knew how I wearied for you when you went to Cumberland.”

“To Cumberland! How know you I went thither?”

“Oh, I but guessed that; but now I know it, by your face. But go where thou wilt, the house is dull directly. Thou art our sunshine. Isn’t he, my poppet?”

“Well, well; if it kept me too long from thee, I could give it up. But, child, we must think of young master. You could manage the inn, and your mother the farm, without me; and I should be earning money on my side. I want to make a gentleman of him.”

“Anything for *him*,” said Mercy, “anything

in the world." But the tears stood in her eyes.

In furtherance of this deceit, Griffith did one day actually ride to Lancaster, and slept there. He wrote to Kate, from that town, to say he was detained by a slight illness, but hoped to be home in a week: and the next day brought Mercy home some ribbons, and told her he had seen the merchant, and his brother, and they had made him a very fair offer. "But I've a week to think of it," said he, "so there's no hurry."

Mercy fixed her eyes on him in a very peculiar way, and made no reply. You must know that something very curious had happened whilst Griffith was gone to Lancaster.

A travelling pedlar, passing by, was struck with the name on the signboard. "Halloo!" said he, "why here's a namesake of mine; I'll have a glass of his ale any way."

So he came into the public room, and called for

a glass ; taking care to open his pack and display his inviting wares. Harry Vint served him. "Here's your health," said the pedlar. "You must drink with me, you must."

"And welcome," said the old man.

"Well," said the pedlar, "I do travel five counties ; but for all that you are the first namesake I have found. I am Thomas Leicester, too, as sure as you are a living sinner."

The old man laughed, and said, "Then no namesake of mine are you ; for they call me Harry Vint. Thomas Leicester, he that keeps this inn now, is my son-in-law : he is gone to Lancaster this morning."

The pedlar said that was a pity, he should have liked to see his namesake, and drink a glass with him.

"Come again to-morrow," said Harry Vint, ironically. "Dame," he cried, "come hither. Here's another Thomas Leicester for ye, wants to see our one."

Mrs. Vint turned her head, and inspected the pedlar from afar, as if he was some natural curiosity.

“Where do you come from, young man?” said she.

“Well, I came from Kendal last; but I am Cumberland born.”

“Why, that is where t’other comes from,” suggested Paul Carrick, who was once more a frequenter of the house.

“Like enow,” said Mrs. Vint.

With that she dropped the matter as one of no consequence, and retired. But she went straight to Mercy, in the parlour, and told her there was a man in the kitchen that called himself Thomas Leicester.

“Well, mother?” said Mercy, with high indifference, for she was trying new socks on King Baby.

“He comes from Cumberland.”

“Well, to be sure, names do run in counties.”

“That is true; but, seems to me, he favours your man: much of a height, and—— There, do just step into the kitchen a moment.”

“La, mother,” said Mercy, “I don’t desire to see any more Thomas Leicesters than my own: ’tis the man, not the name. Isn’t it, my lamb?”

Mrs. Vint went back to the kitchen discomfited; but, with quiet pertinacity, she brought Thomas Leicester into the parlour, pack and all.

“There, Mercy,” said she, “lay out a penny with thy husband’s namesake.”

Mercy did not reply, for, at that moment, Thomas Leicester caught sight of Griffith’s portrait, and gave a sudden start, and a most extraordinary look besides.

Both the women’s eyes happened to be upon him, and they saw at once that he knew the original.

“You know my husband?” said Mercy Vint, after a while.

“Not I,” said Leicester, looking askant at the picture.

“Don’t tell no lies,” said Mrs. Vint. “You do know him well.” And she pointed her assertion by looking at the portrait.

“Oh, I know him, whose picture hangs there, of course,” said Leicester.

“Well, and that *is* her husband.”

“Oh, that is her husband, is it?” And he was unaffectedly puzzled.

Mercy turned pale. “Yes, he is my husband,” said she, “and this is our child. Can you tell me anything about him? for he came a stranger to these parts. Belike you are a kinsman of his?”

“So they say.”

This reply puzzled both women.

“Any way,” said the pedlar, “you see we are marked alike.” And he showed a long black mole on his forehead. Mercy was now as curious as she had been indifferent. “Tell me all about

him," said she: "how comes it that he is a gentleman and thou a pedlar?"

"Well, because my mother was a gipsy, and his a gentlewoman."

"What brought him to these parts?"

"Trouble, they say."

"What trouble?"

"Nay, I know not." This after a slight but visible hesitation.

"But you have heard say."

"Well, I am always on the foot, and don't bide long enough in one place to learn all the gossip. But I do remember hearing he was gone to sea: and that was a lie, for he had settled here, and married you. Ifackins, he might have done worse. He has got a bonny buxom wife, and a rare fine boy, to be sure."

And now the pedlar was on his guard, and determined he would not be the one to break up the household he saw before him, and afflict the

dove-eyed wife and mother. He was a good-natured fellow, and averse to make mischief with his own hands. Besides, he took for granted Griffith loved his new wife better than the old one; and above all, the punishment of bigamy was severe, and was it for him to get the Squire indicted, and branded in the hand for a felon?

So the women could get nothing more out of him; he lied, evaded, shuffled, and feigned utter ignorance; pleading, adroitly enough, his vagrant life.

All this, however, aroused vague suspicions in Mrs. Vint's mind, and she went and whispered them to her favourite, Paul Carriek. "And, Paul," said she, "call for what you like, and score it to me; only treat this pedlar till he leaks out summut: to be sure he'll tell a man more than he will us."

Paul entered with zeal into this commission:



treated the pedlar to a chop, and plied him well with the best ale.

All this failed to loose the pedlar's tongue at the time, but it muddled his judgment: on resuming his journey, he gave his entertainer a wink. Carrick rose and followed him out.

"You seem a decent lad," said the pedlar, "and a good-hearted one. Wilt do me a favour?"

Carrick said he would, if it lay in his power.

"Oh, it is easy enow," said the pedlar. "'Tis just to give yon Thomas Leicester, into his own hand, this here trifle as soon as ever he comes home." And he handed Carrick a hard substance wrapped in paper. Carrick promised.

"Ay, ay, lad," said the pedlar, "but see you play fair, and give it him unbeknown. Now don't you be so simple as show it to any of the women-folk. Dy'e understand?"

"All right," said Carrick, knowingly. And so the boon companions for a day shook hands and parted.

And Carriek took the little parcel straight to Mrs. Vint, and told her every word the pedlar had said.

And Mrs. Vint took the little parcel straight to Mercy, and told her what Carriek said the pedlar had said.

And the pedlar went off flushed with beer and self-complacency ; for he thought he had drawn the line precisely ; had faithfully discharged his promise to his lady and benefactress, but not so as to make mischief in another household.

Such was the power of Ale—in the last century.

Mercy undid the paper and found the bullet, on which was engraved

### **“I LOVE KATE.”**

As she read these words a knife seemed to enter her heart ; the pang was so keen.

But she soon took herself to task. “Thou

naughty woman," said she. "What! jealous of the dead?"

She wrapped the bullet up; put it carefully away; had a good cry; and was herself again.

But all this set her watching Griffith, and reading his face. She had subtle, vague, misgivings; and forbade her mother to mention the pedlar's visit to Griffith yet awhile. Woman-like, she preferred to worm out the truth.

On the evening of his return from Lancaster, as he was smoking his pipe, she quietly tested him. She fixed her eyes on him, and said, "One was here to-day that knows thee, and brought thee this." She then handed him the bullet, and watched his face.

Griffith undid the paper carelessly enough; but, at sight of the bullet, uttered a loud cry, and his eyes seemed ready to start out of his head.

He turned as pale as ashes, and stammered,

piteously, "What? what? what d'ye mean? In Heaven's name, what is this? How? Who?"

Mercy was surprised, but also much concerned at his distress, and tried to soothe him. She also asked him, piteously, whether she had done wrong to give it him. "God knows," said she, "'tis no business of mine to go and remind thee of her thou hast loved better mayhap than thou lovest me. But to keep it from thee, and she in her grave, oh I had not the heart!"

But Griffith's agitation increased instead of diminishing; and, even while she was trying to soothe him, he rushed wildly out of the room, and into the open air.

Mercy went, in perplexity and distress, and told her mother.

Mrs. Vint, not being blinded by affection, thought the whole thing had a very ugly look, and said as much. She gave it as her opinion that this Kate was alive, and had sent the

token herself, to make mischief between man and wife.

“That shall she never,” said Mercy, stoutly; but now her suspicions were thoroughly excited, and her happiness disturbed.

The next day Griffith found her in tears: he asked her what was the matter. She would not tell him.

“You have your secrets,” said she: “and so now I have mine.”

Griffith became very uneasy.

For now Mercy was often in tears, and Mrs. Vint looked daggers at him.

All this was mysterious, and unintelligible, and, to a guilty man, very alarming.

At last he implored Mercy to speak out. He wanted to know the worst.

Then Mercy did speak out. “You have deceived me,” said she. “Kate is alive. This

very morning, between sleeping and waking, you whispered her name ; ay, false man, whispered it like a lover. You told me she was dead. But she is alive ; and has sent you a reminder, and the bare sight of it hath turned your heart her way again. What shall I do ? Why did you marry me, if you could not forget her ? I did not want you to desert any woman for me. The desire of my heart was always for your happiness. But oh, Thomas, deceit and falsehood will not bring you happiness, no more than they will me. What shall I do ? what shall I do ?”

Her tears flowed freely, and Griffith sat down, and groaned with horror and remorse, beside her.

He had not the courage to tell her the horrible truth, that Kate was his wife, and she was not.

“Do not thou afflict thyself,” he muttered. “Of course, with you putting that bullet in my hand so sudden, it set my fancy a wandering back to other days.”

“Ah!” said Mercy, “if it be no worse than that, there’s little harm. But why did thy namesake start so at sight of thy picture?”

“My namesake!” cried Griffith, all aghast.

“Ay, he that brought thee that love-token; Thomas Leicester. Nay, for very shame, feign not ignorance of him; why, he hath thy very mole on his temple, and knew thy picture in a moment. He is thy half-brother, is he not?”

“I am a ruined man,” cried Griffith; and sank into a chair without power of motion.

“God help me, what is all this?” cried Mercy. “Oh, Thomas, Thomas, I could forgive thee ought but deceit: for both our sakes speak out, and tell me the worst; no harm shall come near thee while I live.”

“How can I tell thee? I am an unfortunate man. The world will call me a villain; yet I am not a villain at heart. But who will believe me? I have broken the law. Thee I could

trust, but not thy folk; they never loved me. Mercy, for pity's sake, when was that Thomas Leicester here?"

"Four days ago."

"Which way went he?"

"I hear he told Paul he was going to Cumberland."

"If he gets there before me, I shall rot in gaol."

"Now Heaven forbid! Oh, Thomas, then mount and ride after him."

"I will, and this very moment."

He saddled Black Dick, and loaded his pistols for the journey; but, ere he went, a pale face looked out into the yard, and a finger beckoned. It was Mercy. She bade him follow her. She took him to her room, where their child was sleeping; and then she closed, and even locked the door.

"No soul can hear us," said she; "now, look



me in the face, and tell me God's truth. Who and what are you?"

Griffith shuddered at this exordium; he made no reply.

Mercy went to a box, and took out an old shirt of his; the one he wore when he first came to the "Packhorse." She brought it to him and showed him "G. G." embroidered on it with a woman's hair. (Ryder's.)

"Here are your initials," said she; "now leave useless falsehoods; be a man, and tell me your real name."

"My name is Griffith Gaunt."

"Mercy, sick at heart, turned her head away; but she had the resolution to urge him on. "Go on," said she, in an agonized whisper: "if you believe in God, and a judgment to come, deceive me no more. The truth! I say: the truth!"

"So be it," said Griffith, desperately: "when

I have told thee what a villain I am, I can die at thy feet, and then thou wilt forgive me."

"Who is Kate?" was all she replied.

"Kate is—MY WIFE."

"I thought her false; who could think any other; appearances were so strong against her: others thought so beside me. I raised my hand to kill her; but she never winced. I trampled on him I believed her paramour: I fled, and soon I lay a dying in this house for her sake. I told thee she was dead. Alas! I thought her dead to me. I went back to our house (it is her house) sore against the grain, to get money for thee and thine. Then she cleared herself, bright as the sun, and pure as snow. She was all in black for me; she had put by money, against I should come to my senses and need it. I told her I owed a debt in Lancashire, a debt of gratitude as well as money: and so I did. How have I repaid it?

The poor soul forced five hundred pounds on me. I had much ado to keep her from bringing it hither with her own hands ; oh, villain ! villain ! Then I thought to leave thee, and send thee word I was dead ; and heap money on thee. Money ! But how could I ? Thou wast my benefactress, my more than wife. All the riches of the world can make no return to thee. What, what shall I do ? Shall I fly with thee and thy child across the seas ? Shall I go back to her ? No, the best thing I can do is to take this good pistol, and let the life out of my dishonourable carcass, and free two honest women from me by one resolute act."

In his despair he cocked the pistol ; and, at a word from Mercy, this tale had ended.

But the poor woman, pale and trembling, tottered across the room, and took it out of his hand. "I would not harm thy body, nor thy soul," she gasped. "Let me draw my breath, and think."

She rocked herself to and fro in silence.

Griffith stood trembling like a criminal before his judge.

It was long ere she could speak, for anguish. Yet when she did speak, it was with a sort of deadly calm.

“Go tell the truth to *her*, as you have done to me : and, if she can forgive you, all the better for you. I can never forgive you, nor yet can harm you. My child, my child ! Thy father is our ruin. Oh begone, man, or the sight of you will kill us both.”

“At that he fell at her knees ; kissed, and wept over her cold hand, and, in his pity and despair, offered to cross the seas with her and her child, and so repair the wrong he had done her.

“Tempt me not,” she sobbed. “Go : leave me. None here shall ever know thy crime, but she whose heart thou hast broken, and ruined her good name.”

He took her in his arms, in spite of her resistance, and kissed her passionately ; but, for the first time, she shuddered at his embrace, and that gave him the power to leave her.

He rushed from her, all but distracted, and rode away to Cumberland ; but not to tell the truth to Kate, if he could possibly help it.

## CHAPTER III.

AT this particular time, no man's presence was more desired in that county than Griffith Gaunt's.

And this I need not now be telling the reader, if I had related this story on the plan of a miscellaneous chronicle. But the affairs of the heart are so absorbing, that, even in a narrative, they thrust aside important circumstances of a less moving kind.

I must therefore go back a step, before I advance further. You must know that forty years before our Griffith Gaunt saw the light, another Griffith Gaunt was born in Cumberland: a

younger son, and the family estate entailed ; but a shrewd lad, who chose rather to hunt fortune elsewhere, than to live in miserable dependence on his elder brother. His godfather, a city merchant, encouraged him, and he left Cumberland. He went into commerce, and in twenty years became a wealthy man, so wealthy that he lived to look down on his brother's estate, which he had once thought opulence. His life was all prosperity, with a single exception ; but that a bitter one. He laid out some of his funds in a fashionable and beautiful wife. He loved her before marriage : and, as she was always cold to him, he loved her more and more.

In the second year of their marriage she ran away from him ; and no beggar in the streets of London was so miserable as the wealthy merchant.

It blighted the man, and left him a sore heart all his days. He never married again ; and railed on

all womankind for this one. He led a solitary life in London till he was sixty-nine; and then, all of a sudden, Nature, or accident, or both, changed his whole habits. Word came to him that the family estate, already deeply mortgaged, was for sale, and a farmer who had rented a principal farm on it, and held a heavy mortgage, had made the highest offer.

Old Griffith sent down Mr. Atkins, his solicitor, post haste, and snapped the estate out of that purchaser's hands.

When the lands and house had been duly conveyed to him, he came down, and his heart seemed to bud again, in the scenes of his childhood.

Finding the house small, and built in a valley instead of on rising ground, he got an army of bricklayers, and began to build a mansion with a rapidity unheard of in those parts; and he looked about for some one to inherit it.



The name of Gaunt had dwindled down to three since he left Cumberland ; but a rich man never lacks relations. Featherstonhaughs, and Underhills, and even Smiths, poured in, with parish registers in their laps, and proved themselves Gauntesses ; and flattered and carneyed the new head of the family.

Then the perverse old gentleman felt inclined to look elsewhere. He knew he had a namesake at the other side of the county, but this namesake did not come near him.

This independent Gaunt excited his curiosity and interest. He made inquiries, and heard that young Griffith had just quarrelled with his wife, and gone away in despair.

Griffith senior took for granted that the fault lay with Mrs. Gaunt, and wasted some good sympathy on Griffith junior.

On further inquiry he learnt that the truant was dependent on his wife. Then, argued the

moneyed man, he would not run away from her, but that his wound was deep.

The consequence of all this was, that he made a will very favourable to his absent and injured (?) namesake. He left numerous bequests; but made Griffith his residuary legatee; and having settled this matter, urged on, and superintended his workmen.

Alas! just as the roof was going on, a narrower house claimed him, and he made good the saying of the wise bard—

———*Tu secunda marmora  
Locas sub ipsum funus et sepulchri  
Immemor struis domos.*

The heir of his own choosing could not be found to attend his funeral; and Mr. Atkins, his solicitor, a very worthy man, was really hurt at this. With the quiet bitterness of a displeased attorney; he merely sent Mrs. Gaunt word her husband inherited something under the will, and

she would do well to produce him, or else furnish him (Atkins) with proof of his decease.

Mrs. Gaunt was offended by this cavalier note, and replied very like a woman, and very unlike Business.

“I do not know where he is,” said she, “nor whether he is alive or dead. Nor do I feel disposed to raise the hue and cry after him. But, favour me with your address, and I shall let you know should I hear anything about him.”

Mr. Atkins was half annoyed, half amused, at this piece of indifference. It never occurred to him that it might be all put on.

He wrote back to say that the estate was large, and, owing to the terms of the will, could not be administered without Mr. Griffith Gaunt; and, in the interest of the said Griffith Gaunt, and also of the other legatees, he really must advertise for him.

La Gaunt replied that he was very welcome to advertise for whomsoever he pleased.

Mr. Atkins was a very worthy man; but human. To tell the truth, he was himself one of the other legatees. He inherited (and, to be just, had well deserved,) four thousand guineas, under the will, and could not legally touch it without Griffith Gaunt. This little circumstance spurred his professional zeal.

Mr. Atkins advertised for Griffith Gaunt, in the London and Cumberland papers, and in the usual enticing form. He was to apply to Mr. Atkins, Solicitor, of Gray's Inn, and he would hear of something greatly to his advantage.

These advertisements had not been out a fortnight, when Griffith came home, as I have related.

But Mr. Atkins had punished Mrs. Gaunt for her insouciance, by not informing her of the extent of her good fortune; so she merely told

Griffith, casually, that old Griffith Gaunt had left him some money, and the solicitor, Mr. Atkins, could not get on without him. Even this information she did not vouchsafe until she had given him her 500*l.*, for she grudged Atkins the pleasure of supplying her husband with money.

However, as soon as Griffith left her, she wrote to Mr. Atkins to say that her husband had come home in perfect health, thank God ; had only stayed two days, but was to return in a week.

When ten days had elapsed, Atkins wrote to inquire.

She replied he had not yet returned : and this went on till Mr. Atkins showed considerable impatience.

As for Mrs. Gaunt, she made light of the matter to Mr. Atkins ; but, in truth, this new mystery irritated her and pained her deeply.

In one respect she was more unhappy than she had been before he came back at all. Then she

was alone ; her door was closed to commentators. But now, on the strength of so happy a reconciliation, she had re-entered the world, and received visits from Sir George Neville, and others ; and, above all, had announced that Griffith would be back for good in a few days. So now his continued absence exposed her to sly questions from her own sex, to the interchange of glances between female visitors, as well as to the internal torture of doubt and suspense.

But what distracted her most, was the view Mrs. Ryder took of the matter.

That experienced lady had begun to suspect some other woman was at the bottom of Griffith's conduct : and her own love for Griffith was now soured ; repeated disappointments and affronts, *spretæque injuria formæ*, had not quite extinguished it, but had mixed so much spite with it, that she was equally ready to kiss or to stab him.

So she took every opportunity to instil into her

mistress, whose confidence she had won at last, that Griffith was false to her.

“That is the way with these men that are so ready to suspect others. Take my word for it, Dame, he has carried your money to his leman. ’Tis still the honest woman that must bleed for some nasty trollop or other.”

She enforced this theory by examples drawn from her own observations in families, and gave the very names; and drove Mrs. Gaunt almost mad with fear, anger, jealousy, and cruel suspense. She could not sleep, she could not eat; she was in a constant fever.

Yet before the world she battled it out bravely, and indeed none but Ryder knew the anguish of her spirit, and her passionate wrath.

At last there came a most eventful day.

Mrs. Gaunt had summoned all her pride and fortitude, and invited certain ladies and gentlemen to dine and sup.

She was one of the true Spartan breed, and played the hostess as well as if her heart had been at ease. It was an age in which the host struggled fiercely to entertain the guests; and Mrs. Gaunt was taxing all her powers of pleasing in the dining-room, when an unexpected guest strolled into the kitchen. The pedlar, Thomas Leicester.

Jane welcomed him cordially, and he was soon seated at a table eating his share of the feast.

Presently Mrs. Ryder came down, dressed in her best, and looking handsomer than ever.

At sight of her, Tom Leicester's affection revived; and he soon took occasion to whisper an inquiry whether she was still single.

"Ay," said she, "and like to be."

"Waiting for the master still? Mayhap I could cure you of that complaint. But least said is soonest mended."

This mysterious hint showed Ryder he had a



secret burning his bosom. The sly hussy said nothing just then, but plied him with ale and flattery; and, when he whispered a request for a private meeting out of doors, she cast her eyes down, and assented.

And in that meeting she carried herself so adroitly, that he renewed his offer of marriage, and told her not to waste her fancy on a man who cared neither for her nor any other she in Cumberland.

“Prove that to me,” said Ryder, cunningly, “and may be I’ll take you at your word.”

The bribe was not to be resisted. Tom revealed to her, under a solemn promise of secrecy, that the Squire had got a wife and child in Lancashire; and had a farm and an inn, which latter he kept, under the name of—Thomas Leicester.

In short, he told her, in his way, all the particulars I have told in mine.

She led him on with a voice of very velvet. He did not see how her cheek paled and her eyes flashed jealous fury.

When she had sucked him dry, she suddenly turned on him, with a cold voice, and said, "I can't stay any longer with you just now. She will want me."

"You will meet me here again, lass?" said Tom, ruefully.

"Yes, for a minute, after supper."

She then left him and went to Mrs. Gaunt's room, and sat crouching before the fire, all hate and bitterness.

What? he had left the wife he loved, and yet had not turned to her!

She sat there, waiting for Mrs. Gaunt, and nursing her vindictive fury, two mortal hours.

At last, just before supper, Mrs. Gaunt came up to her room, to cool her fevered hands and brow, and found this creature crouched by her fire, all

in a heap, with pale cheek, and black eyes that glittered like basilisk's.

"What is the matter, child?" said Mrs. Gaunt.  
"Good Heavens! what hath happened?"

"Dame!" said Ryder, sternly, "I have got news of him."

"News of *him*?" faltered Mrs. Gaunt. "Bad news?"

"I don't know whether to tell you or not," said Ryder, sulkily, but with a touch of human feeling.

"What cannot I bear? What have I not borne? Tell me the truth."

The words were stout, but she trembled all over in uttering them.

"Well, it is as I said; only worse. Dame, he has got a wife and child in another county; and no doubt been deceiving her, as he has *us*."

"A wife!" gasped Mrs. Gaunt, and one white hand clutched her bosom, and the other the mantel-piece.

“Ay, Thomas Leicester, that is in the kitchen now, saw her, and saw his picture hanging aside hers on the wall. And he goes by the name of Thomas Leicester: that was what made Tom go into the inn, seeing his own name on the sign-board. Nay, Dame, never give way like that, lean on me; so. He is a villain, a false, jealous, double-faced villain.”

Mrs. Gaunt's head fell on Ryder's shoulder, and she said no word; but only moaned and moaned, and her white teeth clicked convulsively together.

Ryder wept over her sad state: the tears were half impulse, half crocodile.

She applied hartshorn to the sufferer's nostrils, and tried to rouse her mind by exciting her anger. But all was in vain. There hung the betrayed wife, pale, crushed, and quivering under the cruel blow.

Ryder asked her if she should go down and excuse her to her guests.

She nodded a feeble assent.

Ryder then laid her down on the bed with her head low, and was just about to leave her on that errand, when hurried steps were heard outside the door, and one of the female servants knocked; and, not waiting to be invited, put her head in, and cried, "Oh, Dame, the Master is come home. He is in the kitchen."

## CHAPTER IV.

MRS. RYDER made an agitated motion with her hand, and gave the girl such a look withal, that she retired precipitately.

But Mrs. Gaunt had caught the words, and they literally transformed her. She sprang off the bed, and stood erect, and looked a Saxon Pythoness : golden hair streaming down her back and grey eyes gleaming with fury.

She caught up a little ivory-handled knife, and held it above her head.

“I’ll drive this into his heart before them all,” she cried, “and tell them the reason *afterwards* !”

Ryder looked at her for a moment in utter terror.

She saw a woman with grander passions than herself: a woman that looked quite capable of executing her sanguinary threat. Ryder made no more ado, but slipped out directly to prevent a meeting that might be attended with such terrible consequences.

She found her master in the kitchen, splashed with mud, drinking a horn of ale after his ride, and looking rather troubled and anxious; and, by the keen eye of her sex, she saw that the female servants were also in considerable anxiety. The fact is they had just extemporized a lie.

Tom Leicester being near the kitchen window, had seen Griffith ride into the court-yard.

At sight of that well-known figure, he drew back, and his heart quaked at his own imprudence, in confiding Griffith's secret to Caroline Ryder.

"Lasses," said he, hastily, "do me a kindness for old acquaintance. Here's the Squire. For heaven's sake don't let him know I am in the

house, or there will be bloodshed between us; he is a hasty man, and I'm another. I'll tell ye more by and by."

The next moment Griffith's tread was heard approaching the very door, and Leicester darted into the housekeeper's room, and hid in a cupboard there.

Griffith opened the kitchen door, and stood upon the threshold.

The women curtseyed to him, and were loud in welcome.

He returned their civilities briefly; and then his first word was—"Hath Thomas Leicester been here?"

You know how servants stick together against their master. The girls looked him in the face, like candid doves, and told him Leicester had not been that way for six months or more.

Why, I have tracked him to within two miles," said Griffith, doubtfully.



“Then he is sure to come here,” said Jane, adroitly. “He wouldn’t ever think to go by us.”

“The moment he enters the house you let me know. He is a mischief-making loon.”

He then asked for a horn of ale ; and, as he finished it, Ryder came in, and he turned to her, and asked her after her mistress.

“She is well, just now,” said Ryder ; “but she has been took with a spasm : and it would be well, sir, if you could dress, and entertain the company in her place awhile. For I must tell you your being so long away hath set their tongues going, and almost broken my lady’s heart.”

Griffith sighed, and said he could not help it, and now he was here, he would do all in his power to please her. “I’ll go to her at once,” said he.

“No, sir!” said Ryder, firmly. “Come with me. I want to speak to you.”

She took him to his bachelor’s room, and stayed a few minutes to talk to him.

“Master,” said she, solemnly; “things are very serious here. Why did you stay so long away? Our Dame says some woman is at the bottom of it, and she’ll put a knife into you if you come a nigh her.”

This threat did not appal Griffith, as Ryder expected. Indeed, he seemed rather flattered.

“Poor Kate!” said he, “she is just the woman to do it. But I am afraid she does not love me enough for that. But indeed how should she?”

“Well, sir,” replied Ryder, “oblige me by keeping clear of her for a little while. I have got orders to make your bed here. Now, dress, like a good soul, and then go down and show respect to the company that is in your house; for they know you are here.”

“Why, that is the least I can do,” said Griffith. “Put you out what I am to wear, and then run and say I’ll be with them anon.”

Griffith walked into the dining-room, and,

somewhat to his surprise, after what Ryder had said, found Mrs. Gaunt seated at the head of her own table, and presiding like a radiant queen over a brilliant assembly.

He walked in, and made a low bow to his guests first: then he approached, to greet his wife more freely; but she drew back decidedly, and made him a curtsy, the dignity and distance of which struck the whole company.

Sir George Neville, who was at the bottom of the table, proposed, with his usual courtesy, to resign his place to Griffith. But Mrs. Gaunt forbade the arrangement.

“No, Sir George,” said she, “this is but an occasional visitor: you are my constant friend.”

If this had been said pleasantly, well and good; but the guests looked in vain into their hostess’s face for the smile that ought to have accompanied so strange a speech and disarmed it.

“Rarities are the more welcome,” said a lady,

coming to the rescue; and edged aside to make room for him.

“Madam,” said Griffith, “I am in your debt for that explanation; but I hope you will be no rarity here, for all that.”

Supper proceeded; but the mirth languished. Somehow or other, the chill fact that there was a grave quarrel between two at the table, and those two man and wife, insinuated itself into the spirits of the guests.

There began to be lulls: fatal lulls. And in one of these, some unlucky voice was heard to murmur, “Such a meeting of man and wife, I never saw.”

The hearers felt miserable at this personality, that fell upon the ear of Silence like a thunderbolt.

Griffith was ill-advised enough to notice the remark, though clearly not intended for his ears. For one thing, his jealousy had actually revived

at the cool preference Kate had shown his old rival, Neville.

“Oh!” said he, bitterly, “a man is not always his wife’s favourite.”

“He does not always deserve to be,” said Mrs. Gaunt, sternly.

When matters had gone that length, one idea seemed to occur pretty simultaneously to all the well-bred guests: and that idea was, *Sauve qui peut*.

Mrs. Gaunt took leave of them, one by one, and husband and wife were left alone.

Mrs. Gaunt by this time was alarmed at the violence of her own passions, and wished to avoid Griffith for that night at all events. So she cast one terribly stern look upon him, and was about to retire in grim silence. But he, indignant at the public affront she had put on him, and not aware of the true cause, unfortunately detained her. He said, sulkily, “What sort of a reception was that you gave me?”

This was too much. She turned on him furiously. "Too good for thee, thou heartless creature! Thomas Leicester is here, and I know thee for a villain."

"You know nothing," cried Griffith. "Would you believe that mischief-making knave? What has he told you?"

"Go back to *her*!" cried Mrs. Gaunt furiously. "Me you can deceive and pillage no more. So, this was your jealousy! False and forsworn yourself, you dared to suspect and insult me. Ah! and you think I am the woman to endure this? I'll have your life for it! I'll have your life."

Griffith endeavoured to soften her; protested that, notwithstanding appearances, he had never loved but her.

"I'll soon be rid of you, and your love," said the raging woman. "The constables shall come for you to-morrow. You have seen how I can love, you shall know how I can hate."

She then, in her fury, poured out a torrent of reproaches and threats that made his blood run cold. He could not answer her: he *had* suspected her wrongfully, and been false to her himself. He *had* abused her generosity, and taken her money for Mercy Vint.

After one or two vain efforts to check the torrent, he sank into a chair, and hid his face in his hands.

But this did not disarm her, at the time. Her raging voice and raging words were heard by the very servants, long after he had ceased to defend himself.

At last she came out, pale with fury, and finding Ryder near the door, shrieked out, "Take that reptile to his den, if he is mean enough to lie in this house:" then, lowering her voice, "and bring Thomas Leicester to me."

Ryder went to Leicester, and told him. But he objected to come. "You have betrayed me,"

said he. "Curse my weak heart, and my loose tongue. I have done the poor Squire an ill turn. I can never look him in the face again. But 'tis all thy fault, double-face. I hate the sight of thee."

At this Ryder shed some crocodile tears; and very soon, by her blandishments, obtained forgiveness.

And Leicester, since the mischief was done, was persuaded to see the Dame, who was his recent benefactor, you know. He bargained, however, that the Squire should be got to bed first, for he had a great dread of meeting him. "He'll break every bone in my skin," said Tom; "or else I shall do *him* a mischief in my defence."

Ryder herself saw the wisdom of this: she bade him stay quiet, and she went to look after Griffith.

She found him in the drawing-room, with his head on the table, in deep dejection.



She assumed authority, and said he must go to bed.

He rose humbly, and followed her like a submissive dog.

She took him to his room. There was no fire.

"That is where you are to sleep," said she, spitefully.

"It is better than I deserve," said he, humbly.

The absurd rule about not hitting a man when he is down, has never obtained a place in the great female soul; so Ryder lashed him without mercy.

"Well, sir," said she, "methinks you have gained little by breaking faith with me. Y' had better have set up your inn with me, than gone and sinned against the law."

"Much better: would to Heaven I had!"

"What d'ye mean to do now? You know the saying. Between two stools——."

"Child," said Griffith, faintly, "methinks I

shall trouble neither long. I am not so ill a man as I seem ; but who will believe that ? I shall not live long. And I shall leave an ill name behind me. *She* told me so just now. And, oh, her eye was so cruel ; I saw my death in it."

"Come, come," said Ryder, relenting a little, "you mustn't believe every word an angry woman says. There, take my advice ; go to bed ; and in the morning don't speak to her ; keep out of her way a day or two."

And with this piece of friendly advice she left him ; and waited about till she thought he was in bed and asleep. .

Then she brought Thomas Leicester up to her mistress.

But Griffith was not in bed ; and he heard Leicester's heavy tread cross the landing. He waited and waited behind his door for more than half an hour, and then he heard the same heavy tread go away again.

By this time nearly all the inmates of the house were asleep.

About twenty-five minutes after Leicester left Mrs. Gaunt, Caroline Ryder stole quietly upstairs from the kitchen; and sat down to think it all over.

She then proceeded to undress: but had only taken off her gown, when she started and listened; for a cry of distress reached her from outside the house.

She darted to the window and threw it open.

Then she heard a cry more distinct. "Help! help!"

It was a clear starlight night, but no moon.

The mere shone before her, and the cries were on the bank.

Now came something more alarming still. A flash: a pistol shot: and an agonized voice cried loudly, "Murder! Help! Murder!"

That voice she knew directly. It was Griffith Gaunt's.

## CHAPTER V.

RYDER ran screaming, and alarmed the other servants.

All the windows that looked on the mere were hung open.

But no more sounds were heard. A terrible silence brooded now over those clear waters.

The female servants huddled together, and quaked ; for who could doubt that a bloody deed had been done ?

It was some time before they mustered the presence of mind to go and tell Mrs. Gaunt. At last they opened her door. She was not in her room.

Ryder ran to Griffith's. It was locked.

She called to him. He made no reply.

They burst the door open. He was not there : and the window was open.

While their tongues were all going, in consternation, Mrs. Gaunt was suddenly among them, very pale.

They turned, and looked at her aghast.

"What means all this?" said she. "Did I not hear cries outside?"

"Ay," said Ryder : "Murder ! and a pistol fired. Oh, my poor master !"

Mrs. Gaunt was white as death ; but self-possessed. "Light torches this moment, and search the place," said she.

There was only one man in the house, and he declined to go out alone. So Ryder and Mrs. Gaunt went with him, all three bearing lighted links.

They searched the place where Ryder had

heard the cries. They went up and down the whole bank of the mere, and cast their torches' red light over the placid waters themselves. But there was nothing to be seen, alive or dead; no trace either of calamity or crime.

They roused the neighbours, and came back to the house with their clothes all draggled and dirty.

Mrs. Gaunt took Ryder apart, and asked her if she could guess at what time of the night Griffith had made his escape.

"He is a villain," said she, "yet I would not have him come to harm, God knows. There are thieves abroad. But I hope he ran away as soon as your back was turned, and so fell not in with them."

"Humph!" said Ryder. Then, looking Mrs. Gaunt in the face, she said, quietly, "Where were you when you heard the cries?"

"I was on the other side of the house."

“What, out o’doors, at that time of night!”

“Ay; I was in the grove. Praying.”

“Did you hear any voice you knew?”

“No: all was too indistinct. I heard a pistol, but no words. Did you?”

“I heard no more than you, madam,” said Ryder, trembling.

No one went to bed any more that night in Hernshaw Castle.

## CHAPTER VI.

THIS mysterious circumstance made a great talk in the village, and in the kitchen of Hernshaw Castle ; but not in the drawing-room : for Mrs. Gaunt instantly closed her door to visitors, and let it be known that it was her intention to retire to a convent ; and, in the meantime, she desired not to be disturbed.

Ryder made one or two attempts to draw her out upon the subject, but was sternly checked.

Pale, gloomy, and silent, the mistress of Hernshaw Castle moved about the place like the ghost of her former self. She never mentioned Griffith ; forbade his name to be uttered in her



hearing; and, strange to say, gave Ryder strict orders not to tell any one what she had heard from Thomas Leicester.

“This last insult is known but to you and me. If it ever gets abroad, you leave my service that very hour.”

This injunction set Ryder thinking. However, she obeyed it to the letter. Her place was getting better and better; and she was a woman accustomed to keep secrets.

A pressing letter came from Mr. Atkins.

Mrs. Gaunt replied that her husband had come to Hernshaw, but had left again; and the period of his ultimate return was now more uncertain than ever.

On this Mr. Atkins came down to Hernshaw Castle. But Mrs. Gaunt would not see him. He retired very angry; and renewed his advertisements, but in a more explicit form. He now published that Griffith Gaunt, of Hernshaw and

Bolton, was executor and residuary legatee to the late Griffith Gaunt, of Coggleswade : and requested him to apply directly to James Atkins, Solicitor, of Gray's Inn, London.

In due course this advertisement was read by the servants at Hernshaw ; and shown, by Ryder, to Mrs. Gaunt.

She made no comment whatever ; and contrived to render her pale face impenetrable.

Ryder became as silent and thoughtful as herself, and often sat bending her black judicial brows.

By-and-by dark mysterious words began to be thrown out in Hernshaw village.

“ He will never come back at all.”

“ He will never come into that fortune.”

“ 'Tis no use advertising for a man that is past reading.”

These, and the like equivocal sayings, were fol-

lowed by a vague buzz, which was traceable to no individual author, but seemed to rise on all sides, like a dark mist, and envelope that unhappy house.

And that dark mist of Rumour soon condensed itself into a palpable and terrible whisper, "Griffith Gaunt hath met with foul play."

No one of the servants told Mrs. Gaunt this horrid rumour.

But the women used to look at her, and after her, with strange eyes.

She noticed this, and felt, somehow, that her people were falling away from her. It added one drop to her bitter cup. She began to droop into a sort of calm despondent lethargy.

Then came fresh trouble to rouse her.

Two of the county magistrates called on her in their official capacity, and, with perfect politeness, but a very grave air, requested her to inform

them of all the circumstances attending her husband's disappearance.

She replied, coldly and curtly, that she knew very little about it. Her husband had left in the middle of the night.

“He came to stay?”

“I believe so.”

“Came on horseback?”

“Yes.”

“Did he go away on horseback?”

“No: for the horse is now in my stable.”

“Is it true there was a quarrel between you and him that evening?”

“Gentlemen,” said Mrs. Gaunt, drawing herself back, haughtily, “did you come here to gratify your curiosity?”

“No, madam,” said the elder of the two; “but to discharge a very serious and painful duty, in which I earnestly request you, and even advise you, to aid us. Was there a quarrel?”

“There was—a mortal quarrel.”

The gentlemen exchanged glances and the elder made a note.

“May we ask the subject of that quarrel?”

Mrs. Gaunt declined, positively, to enter into a matter so delicate.

A note was taken of this refusal.

“Are you aware, madam, that your husband’s voice was heard calling for help, and that a pistol-shot was fired?”

Mrs. Gaunt trembled visibly.

“I heard the pistol shot,” said she, “but not the voice distinctly. Oh, I hope it was not his voice Ryder heard.”

“Ryder, who is he?”

“Ryder is my lady’s-maid: her bedroom is on that side the house.”

“Can we see Mrs. Ryder?”

“Certainly,” said Mrs. Gaunt, and rose and rang the bell.

Mrs. Ryder answered the bell, in person, very promptly ; for she was listening at the door.

Being questioned, she told the magistrates what she had heard down by "the mere ;" and said she was sure it was her master's voice that cried "Help !" and "Murder !" And with this she began to cry.

Mrs. Gaunt trembled and turned pale.

The magistrates confined their questions to Ryder.

They elicited, however, very little more from her. She saw the drift of their questions, and had an impulse to defend her mistress there present. Behind her back it would have been otherwise.

That resolution once taken, two children might as well have tried to extract evidence from her as two justices of the peace.

And then Mrs. Gaunt's pale face and noble features touched them. The case was mysterious,

but no more; and they departed little the wiser and with some apologies for the trouble they had given her.

The next week down came Mr. Atkins out of all patience, and determined to find Griffith Gaunt, or else obtain some proof of his decease.

He obtained two interviews with Ryder, and bribed her to tell him all she knew. He prosecuted other inquiries with more method than had hitherto been used, and elicited an important fact, viz., that Griffith Gaunt had been seen walking in a certain direction at one o'clock in the morning, followed at a short distance by a tall man with a knapsack, or the like, on his back.

The person who gave this tardy information was the wife of a certain farmer's man, who wired hares upon the sly. The man himself, being assured that, in a case so serious as this, no particular inquiries should be made how he came to be out so late, confirmed what his wife had let

out, and added that both men had taken the way that would lead them to the bridge, meaning the bridge over the mere. More than that he could not say, for he had *met* them, and was full half a mile from the mere, before those men could have reached it.

Following up this clue, Mr. Atkins learned so many ugly things, that he went to the Bench on justicing day, and demanded a full and searching inquiry on the premises.

Sir George Neville, after in vain opposing this, rode off straight from the Bench to Hernshaw, and in feeling terms conveyed the bad news to Mrs. Gaunt ; and then, with the utmost delicacy, let her know that some suspicion rested upon herself, which she would do well to meet with the bold front of innocence.

“What suspicion, pray?” said Mrs. Gaunt, haughtily.

Sir George shrugged his shoulders, and replied,



“That you have done Gaunt the honour—to put him out of the way.”

Mrs. Gaunt took this very differently from what Sir George expected.

“What!” she cried, “are they so sure he is dead? murdered!”

And with this, she went into a passion of grief and remorse.

Even Sir George was puzzled, as well as affected, by her convulsive agitation.

## CHAPTER VII.

THOUGH it was known the proposed inquiry might result in the committal of Mrs. Gaunt on a charge of murder, yet the respect in which she had hitherto been held, and the influence of Sir George Neville, who having been her lover, stoutly maintained her innocence, prevailed so far, that even this inquiry was private, and at her own house. Only she was present in the character of a suspected person, and the witnesses were examined before her.

First, the poacher gave his evidence.

Then, Jane the cook proved, that a pedlar called Thomas Leicester had been in the kitchen,

and secreted about the premises till a late hour; and this Thomas Leicester corresponded exactly to the description given by the poacher.

This threw suspicion on Thomas Leicester, but did not connect Mrs. Gaunt with the deed in any way.

But Ryder's evidence filled this gap. She revealed three serious facts:—

First, that, by her mistress's orders, she had introduced this very Leicester into her mistress's room about midnight, where he had remained nearly half an hour, and had then left the house.

Secondly, that Mrs. Gaunt herself had been out of doors after midnight.

And, thirdly, that she had listened at the door, and heard her threaten Griffith Gaunt's life.

This is a mere *précis* of the evidence, and altogether it looked so suspicious, that the magistrates, after telling Mrs. Gaunt she could ask the witnesses any question she chose, a suggestion she treated

with marked contempt, put their heads together a moment, and whispered. Then the eldest of them, Mr. Underhill, who lived at a considerable distance, told her gravely he must commit her to take her trial at the next assizes.

“Do what you conceive to be your duty, gentlemen,” said Mrs. Gaunt, with marvellous dignity. “If I do not assert my innocence, it is because I disdain the accusation too much.”

“I shall take no part in the committal of this innocent lady,” said Sir George Neville: and was about to leave the room.

But Mrs. Gaunt begged him to stay. “To be guilty, is one thing,” said she, “to be accused, is another: I shall go to prison as easy as to my dinner, and to the gallows as to my bed.”

The presiding magistrate was staggered a moment by these words; and it was not without considerable hesitation he took the warrant, and prepared to fill it up.

Then Mr. Houseman, who had watched the proceedings very keenly, put in his word. "I am here for the accused person, sir, and, with your good leave, object to her committal—on grounds of law."

∴ "What may they be, Mr. Houseman?" said the magistrate, civilly; and laid his pen down to hear them.

"Briefly, sir, these. Where a murder is proven, you can commit a subject of this realm upon suspicion. But you cannot suspect the murder as well as the culprit, and so commit. The murder must be proved to the senses. Now in this case the death of Mr. Gaunt by violence is not proved. Indeed his very death rests but upon suspicion. I admit that the law of England in this respect has once or twice been tampered with, and persons have even been executed where no *corpus delicti* was found; but what was the consequence? In each case the murdered man turned out to be

alive, and justice was the only murderer. After Harrison's case, and \*'s, no Cumberland jury will ever commit for murder, unless the corpus delicti has been found, and with signs of violence upon it. Come, come, Mr. Atkins, you are too good a lawyer, and too humane a man, to send my client to prison on the suspicion of a suspicion, which you know the very breath of the judge will blow away, even if the grand jury let it go into court. I offer bail, ten thousand pounds in two sureties; Sir George Neville here present, and myself."

The magistrate looked at Mr. Atkins.

"I am not employed by the Crown," said that gentleman, "but acting on mere civil grounds, and have no right nor wish to be severe. Bail by all means; but is the lady so sure of her innocence as to lend me her assistance to find the corpus delicti?"

The question was so shrewdly put, that any hesitation would have ruined Mrs. Gaunt.

Houseman, therefore, replied eagerly and promptly, "I answer for her, 'she will.'"

Mrs. Gaunt bowed her head in assent.

"Then," said Atkins, "I ask leave to drag, and, if need be, to drain, that piece of water there, called 'the mere.'"

"Drag it, or drain it, which you will," said Houseman.

Said Atkins, very impressively, "And, mark my words, at the bottom of that very sheet of water there, I shall find the remains of the late Griffith Gaunt."

At these solemn words, coming, as they did, not from a loose unprofessional speaker, but from a lawyer, a man who measured all his words, a very keen observer might have seen a sort of tremor run all through Mr. Houseman's frame. The more admirable was the perfect coolness and seeming indifference with which he replied.

"Find him, and I'll admit suicide; find him,

with signs of violence, and I'll admit homicide, by some person or persons unknown."

All further remarks were interrupted by bustle and confusion.

Mrs. Gaunt had fainted dead away.



## CHAPTER VIII.

OF course pity was the first feeling ; but, by the time Mrs. Gaunt revived, her fainting, so soon after Mr. Atkins's proposal, had produced a sinister effect on the minds of all present ; and every face showed it, except the wary Houseman's.

On her retiring, it broke out first in murmurs, then in plain words.

As for Mr. Atkins, he now showed the moderation of an able man who feels he has a strong cause.

He merely said, " I think there should be constables about, in case of an escape being attempted ; but I agree with Mr. Houseman, that

your worships will be quite justified in taking bail, provided the corpus delicti should not be found. Gentlemen, you were most of you neighbours and friends of the deceased, and are, I am sure, lovers of justice: I do entreat you to aid me in searching that piece of water, by the side of which the deceased gentleman was heard to cry for help; and, much I fear, he cried in vain."

The persons thus appealed to entered into the matter with all the ardour of just men, whose curiosity as well as justice is inflamed.

A set of old rusty drags was found on the premises: and men went punting up and down the mere, and dragged it.

Rude hooks were made by the village blacksmith, and fitted to cart-ropes; another boat was brought to Hernshaw in a waggon, and all that afternoon the bottom of the mere was raked; and some curious things fished up. But no dead man.

The next day a score of amateur dragsmen were out: some throwing their drags from the bridge; some circulating in boats, and even in large tubs.

And, meantime, Mr. Atkins and his crew went steadily up and down, dragging every foot of those placid waters.

They worked till dinner time, and brought up a good copper pot with two handles, a horse's head, and several decayed trunks of trees, which had become saturated, and sunk to the bottom.

At about three in the afternoon, two boys who, for want of a boat, were dragging from the bridge, found something heavy but elastic at the end of their drag: they pulled up eagerly, and a thing like a huge turnip, half gnawed, came up, with a great bob, and blasted their sight.

They let go, drags and all, and stood shrieking, and shrieking.

Those who were nearest them called out, and asked what was the matter; but the boys did not

reply, and their faces showed so white, that a woman, who saw them, screamed to Mr. Atkins, and said she was sure those boys had seen something out of the common.

Mr. Atkins came up, and found the boys blubbering. He encouraged them, and they told him a fearful thing had come up ; it was like a man's head and shoulders all scooped out and gnawed by the fishes ; and had torn the drags out of their hands.

Mr. Atkins made them tell him the exact place ; and was soon upon it with his boat.

The water here was very deep, and though the boys kept pointing to the very spot, the drags found nothing for some time.

But at last they showed, by their resistance, that they had clawed hold of something.

“ Draw slowly,” said Mr. Atkins, “ and, *if it is*, be men, and hold fast.”

The men drew slowly, slowly, and presently

there rose to the surface a Thing to strike terror and loathing into the stoutest heart.

The mutilated remains of a human face and body.

The greedy pike had cleared, not the features only, but the entire flesh off the face; but had left the hair, and the tight skin of the forehead, though their teeth had raked this last. The remnants they had left made what they had mutilated doubly horrible; since now it was not a skull; not a skeleton; but a face and a man gnawed down to the bones and hair and feet. These last were in stout shoes that resisted even those voracious teeth; and a leathern stock had offered some little protection to the throat.

The men groaned, and hid their faces with one hand, and pulled softly to the shore with the other; and then, with half-averted faces, they drew the ghastly remains and fluttering rags gently and reverently to land.

Mr. Atkins yielded to Nature, and was violently sick at the sight he had searched for so eagerly.

As soon as he recovered his powers, he bade the constables guard the body (it was a body, in law), and see that no one laid so much as a finger on it until some magistrate had taken a deposition. He also sent a messenger to Mr. Houseman, telling him the *corpus delicti* was found. He did this, partly to show that gentleman he was right in his judgment, and partly out of common humanity; since, after this discovery, Mr. Houseman's client was sure to be tried for her life.

A magistrate soon came, and viewed the remains, and took careful notes of the state in which they were found.

Houseman came, and was much affected, both by the sight of his dead friend, so mutilated, and by the probable consequences to Mrs. Gaunt. However, as lawyers fight very hard, he recovered himself enough to remark that there were no

marks of violence before death, and insisted on this being inserted in the magistrate's notes.

An inquest was ordered next day, and meantime Mrs. Gaunt was told she could not quit the upper apartments of her own house. Two constables were placed on the ground floor night and day.

Next day the remains were removed to the little inn, where Griffith had spent so many jovial hours; laid on a table, and covered with a white sheet.

The coroner's jury sat in the same room, as was then the custom, and the evidence I have already noticed was gone into and the finding of the body deposed to. The jury, without hesitation, returned a verdict of wilful murder.

Mrs. Gaunt was then brought in. She came, white as a ghost, leaning upon Houseman's shoulder.

Upon her entering, a juryman, by a humane impulse, drew the sheet over the remains again

The coroner, according to the custom of the day, put a question to Mrs. Gaunt, with the view of eliciting her guilt. If I remember right, he asked her how she came to be out of doors so late on the night of the murder. Mrs. Gaunt, however, was in no condition to answer queries. I doubt if she even heard this one. Her lovely eyes, dilated with horror, were fixed on that terrible sheet, with a stony glance. "Show me," she gasped, "and let me die too."

The jurymen looked, with doubtful faces, at the coroner. He bowed a grave assent.

The nearest jurymen withdrew the sheet.

Now, the belief was not yet extinct that the dead body shows some signs of its murderer's approach.

So every eye glared on her and it by turns, as she, with dilated, horror-stricken orbs, looked on that awful Thing.



## CHAPTER IX.

SHE recoiled with a violent shudder at first ; and hid her face with one hand. Then she gradually stole a horror-stricken side glance.

She had not looked at it so a moment, when she uttered a loud cry, and pointed at its feet with quivering hand.

“THE SHOES! THE SHOES!—IT IS NOT MY GRIFFITH.”

With this she fell into violent hysterics, and was carried out of the room at Houseman’s earnest entreaty

As soon as she was gone, Mr. Houseman, being freed from his fear that his client would commit

herself irretrievably, recovered a show of composure, and his wits went keenly to work.

“On behalf of the accused,” said he, “I admit the suicide of some person unknown, wearing heavy hobnailed shoes; probably one of the lower order of people.”

This adroit remark produced some little effect, notwithstanding the strong feeling against the accused.

The coroner inquired if there were any bodily marks by which the remains could be identified.

“My master had a long black mole on his forehead,” suggested Caroline Ryder.

“’Tis here!” cried a juryman, bending over the remains.

And now they all gathered in great excitement round the corpus delicti; and there, sure enough, was a long black mole.

Then was there a buzz of pity for Griffith Gaunt, followed by a stern murmur of execration.

“Gentlemen,” said the coroner solemnly, “behold in this the finger of Heaven. The poor gentleman may well have put off his boots, since, it seems, he left his horse ; but he could not take from his forehead his natal sign ; and that, by God’s will, hath strangely escaped mutilation, and revealed a most foul deed. We must now do our duty, gentlemen, without respect of persons.”

A warrant was then issued for the apprehension of Thomas Leicester. And, that same night, Mrs. Gaunt left Hernshaw in her own chariot between two constables, and escorted by armed yeomen.

Her proud head was bowed almost to her knees, and her streaming eyes hidden in her lovely hands. For why ? A mob accompanied her for miles, shouting, “Murderess !—Bloody Papist !—Hast done to death the kindest gentleman in Cumberland. We’ll all come to see thee hanged. —Fair face but foul heart !”—and groaning, hiss-

ing and cursing, and indeed only kept from violence by the escort.

And so they took that poor proud lady and lodged her in Carlisle gaol.

She was enceinte into the bargain. By the man she was to be hanged for murdering.

## CHAPTER X.

THE county was against her, with some few exceptions. Sir George Neville and Mr. Houseman stood stoutly by her.

Sir George's influence and money obtained her certain comforts in gaol; and, in that day, the law of England was so far respected in a gaol, that untried prisoners were not thrown into cells, nor impeded, as they now are, in preparing their defence.

Her two staunch friends visited her every day, and tried to keep her heart up.

But they could not do it. She was in a state of dejection bordering upon lethargy.

“If he is dead,” said she, “what matters it? If, by God’s mercy, he is alive still, he will not let me die for want of a word from him. Impatience hath been my bane. Now, I say, God’s will be done. I am weary of the world.”

Houseman tried every argument to rouse her out of this desperate frame of mind; but in vain.

It ran its course, and then, behold, it passed away like a cloud, and there came a keen desire to live and defeat her accusers.

She made Houseman write out all the evidence against her; and she studied it by day, and thought of it by night; and often surprised both her friends by the acuteness of her remarks.

Mr. Atkins discontinued his advertisements; it was Houseman who now filled every paper with notices informing Griffith Gaunt of his accession to fortune, and entreated him for that, and other

weighty reasons, to communicate in confidence with his old friend John Houseman, attorney-at-law.

Houseman was too wary to invite him to appear and save his wife; for, in that case, he feared the Crown would use his advertisements as evidence at the trial, should Griffith not appear.

The fact is, Houseman relied more upon certain lacunæ in the evidence, and the absence of all marks of violence, than upon any hope that Griffith might be alive.

The assizes drew near, and no fresh light broke in upon this mysterious case.

Mrs. Gaunt lay in her bed at night, and thought and thought.

Now the female understanding has sometimes remarkable power under such circumstances. By degrees Truth flashes across it, like lightning in the dark.

After many such nightly meditations, Mrs.

Gaunt sent one day for Sir George Neville and Mr. Houseman, and addressed them as follows :—  
“I believe he is alive, and that I can guess where he is at this moment.”

Both the gentlemen started, and looked amazed.

“Yes, sirs ; so sure as we sit here, he is now at a little inn in Lancashire, called the ‘Packhorse,’ with a woman he calls his wife.” And, with this, her face was scarlet, and her eyes flashed their old fire.

She exacted a solemn promise of secrecy from them, and then she told them all she had learned from Thomas Leicester.

“And so now,” [said she, “I believe you can save my life, if you think it is worth saving.” And with this, she began to cry bitterly.

But Houseman, the practical, had no patience with the pangs of love betrayed, and jealousy, and such small deer, in a client whose life was at stake.

“Great Heaven ! madam,” said he, roughly, “why did you not tell me this before?”



“Because I am not a man—to go and tell everything all at once,” sobbed Mrs. Gaunt. “Besides, I wanted to shield his good name, whose dear life they pretend I have taken.”

As soon as she recovered her composure, she begged Sir George Neville to ride to the “Packhorse” for her. Sir George assented eagerly; but asked how he was to find it. “I have thought of that too,” said she. “His black horse has been to and fro. Ride that horse into Lancashire, and give him his head: ten to one but he takes you to the place, or where you may hear of it. If not, go to Lancaster, and ask about the ‘Packhorse.’ He wrote to me from Lancaster: see.” And she showed him the letter.

Sir George embraced with ardour this opportunity of serving her. “I’ll be at Hernshaw in one hour,” said he, “and ride the black horse south at once.”

“Excuse me,” said Houseman; “but would it

not be better for me to go? As a lawyer, I may be more able to cope with her."

"Nay," said Mrs. Gaunt, "Sir George is young and handsome: if he manages well, she will tell him more than she will you. All I beg of him is, to drop the chevalier, for this once, and see women with a woman's eyes and not a man's; see them *as they are*. Do not go telling a creature of this kind that she has had my money, as well as my husband, and ought to pity me lying here in prison. Keep me out of her sight as much as you can. Whether Griffith hath deceived her or not you will never raise in her any feeling but love for him, and hatred for his lawful wife. Dress like a yeoman; go quietly, and lodge in the house a day or two; begin by flattering her; and then get from her when she saw him last, or heard from him. But indeed I fear you will surprise him with her."

"Fear?" exclaimed Sir George.

“Well, hope, then,” said the lady; and a tear trickled down her face in a moment. “But, if you do, promise me, on your honour as a gentleman, not to affront him. For I know you think him a villain.”

“A d——d villain! saving your presence.”

“Well, sir, you have said it to me. Now promise me to say nought to *him*, but just this: ‘Rose Gaunt’s mother she lies in Carlisle gaol, to be tried for her life for murdering you. She begs of you not to let her die publicly upon the scaffold; but quietly at home, of her broken heart.’”

“Write it,” said Sir George, with the tears in his eyes, “that I may just put it in his hand: for I can never utter your sweet words to such a monster as he is.”

Armed with this appeal, and several minute instructions, which it is needless to particularize here, that staunch friend rode into Lancashire.

And next day the black horse justified his mistress's sagacity, and his own.

He seemed all along to know where he was going, and late in the afternoon he turned off the road on to a piece of green : and Sir George, with beating heart, saw right before him the sign of the "Packhorse," and, on coming nearer, the words

### THOMAS LEICESTER.

He dismounted at the door, and asked if he could have a bed.

Mrs. Vint said yes ; and supper into the bargain, if he liked.

He ordered a substantial supper directly.

Mrs. Vint saw at once it was a good customer, and showed him into the parlour.

He sat down by the fire. But, the moment she retired, he got up and made a circuit of the house, looking quietly into every window, to see if he could catch a glance of Griffith Gaunt.

There were no signs of him ; and Sir George returned to his parlour heavy-hearted. One hope, the greatest of all, had been defeated directly. Still, it was just possible that Griffith might be away on temporary business.

In this faint hope, Sir George strolled about till his supper was ready for him.

When he had eaten his supper, he rang the bell, and, taking advantage of a common custom, insisted on the landlord, Thomas Leicester, taking a glass with him.

“Thomas Leicester !” said the girl. “He is not at home. But I’ll send Master Vint.”

Old Vint came in, and readily accepted an invitation to drink his guest’s health.

Sir George found him loquacious, and soon extracted from him that his daughter Mercy was Leicester’s wife, that Leicester was gone on a journey, and that Mercy was in care for him. “Leastways,” said he, “she is very dull, and cries

at times when her mother speaks of him ; but she is too close to say much."

All this puzzled Sir George Neville sorely.

But greater surprises were in store.

The next morning, after breakfast, the servant came and told him Dame Leicester desired to see him.

He started at that ; but put on nonchalance, and said he was at her service.

He was ushered into another parlour, and there he found a grave, comely, young woman, seated working, with a child on the floor beside her. She rose quietly ; he bowed low and respectfully ; she blushed faintly ; but, with every appearance of self-possession, curtsied to him ; then eyed him point-blank a single moment ; and requested him to be seated.

" I hear, sir," said she, " you did ask my father many questions last night ; may I ask you one ?"

Sir George coloured, but bowed assent.

“From whom had you the black horse you ride?”

Now, if Sir George had not been a veracious man, he would have been caught directly. But, although he saw at once the oversight he had committed, he replied, “I had him of a lady in Cumberland, one Mistress Gaunt.”

Mercy Vint trembled.

“No doubt,” said she, softly. Excuse my question; you shall understand that the horse is well known here.”

“Madam,” said Sir George, “if you admire the horse, he is at your service for twenty pounds, though indeed he is worth more.”

“I thank you, sir,” said Mercy, “I have no desire for the horse whatever; and be pleased to excuse my curiosity; you must think me impertinent.”

“Nay, madam,” said Sir George, “I consider nothing impertinent that hath procured me the pleasure of an interview with you.”

He then, as directed by Mrs. Gaunt, proceeded to flatter the mother and the child, and exerted those powers of pleasing which had made him irresistible in society.

Here, however, he found they went a very little way. Mercy did not even smile. She cast out of her dove-like eyes a gentle, humble, reproachful glance, as much as to say, "What! do I seem so vain a creature as to believe all this?"

Sir George himself had tact and sensibility; and, by-and-by became discontented with the part he was playing, under those meek, honest, eyes.

There was a pause: and, as her sex have a wonderful art of reading the face, Mercy looked at him steadily, and said, "*Yes*, sir, 'tis best to be straightforward, especially with women-folk."

Before he could recover this little facer, she said, quietly, "What is your name?"

"George Neville."

"Well, George Neville," said Mercy, very



slowly and softly, "when you have a mind to tell me what you came here for, and who sent you, you will find me in this little room. I seldom leave it now. I beg you to speak your errand to none but me." And she sighed deeply.

Sir George bowed low, and retired to collect his wits.

He had come here strongly prepossessed against Mercy. But, instead of a vulgar, shallow woman, whom he was to surprise into confession, he encountered a soft-eyed Puritan, all unpretending dignity, grace, propriety, and sagacity.

"Flatter her!" said he, to himself, "I might as well flatter an iceberg. Out-wit her! I feel like a child beside her."

He strolled about in a brown study, not knowing what to do.

She had given him a fair opening. She had invited him to tell the truth. But he was afraid to take her at her word: and yet what was the

use to persist in what his own eyes told him was the wrong course ?

Whilst he hesitated, and debated within himself, a trifling incident turned the scale.

A poor woman came begging, with her child, and was received rather roughly by Harry Vint. "Pass on, good woman," said he, we want no tramps here."

Then a window was opened on the ground floor, and Mercy beckoned the woman. Sir George flattened himself against the wall, and listened to the two talking.

Mercy examined the woman gently, but shrewdly, and elicited a tale of genuine distress. Sir George then saw her hand out to the woman some warm flannel for herself, a piece of stuff for the child, a large piece of bread, and a sixpence.

He also caught sight of Mercy's dove-like eyes, as she bestowed her alms, and they were lit with an inward lustre.

"She cannot be an ill woman," thought Sir George. "I'll e'en go by my own eyes and judgment. After all, Mrs. Gaunt has never seen her; and I have."

He went and knocked at Mercy's door.

"Come in," said a mild voice.

Neville entered, and said, abruptly, and with great emotion, "Madam, I see you can feel for the unhappy; so I take my own way now, and appeal to your pity. I *have* come to speak to you on the saddest business."

"You come from *him*," said Mercy, closing her lips tight; but her bosom heaved. Her heart and her judgment grappled like wrestlers that moment.

"Nay, madam," said Sir George, "I come from *her*."

Mercy knew in a moment who "her" must be.

She looked scared, and drew back with manifest signs of repulsion.

The movement did not escape Sir George: it alarmed him: he remembered what Mrs. Gaunt had said; that this woman would be sure to hate Gaunt's lawful wife. But it was too late to go back. He did the next best thing, he rushed on.

He threw himself on his knees before Mercy Vint.

"Oh, madam!" he cried, piteously, "do not set your heart against the most unhappy lady in England. If you did but know her, her nobleness, her misery! Before you steel yourself against me, her friend, let me ask you one question. Do you know where Mrs. Gaunt is at this moment?"

Mercy answered, coldly, "How should I know where the lady is?"

"Well then, she lies in Carlisle gaol."

"She—lies—in Carlisle gaol?" repeated Mercy, looking all confused.

"They accuse her of murdering her husband."

Mercy uttered a scream, and catching her child

up off the floor, began to rock herself and moan over it.

"No, no, no," cried Sir George, "she is innocent, she is innocent."

"What is that to *me*?" cried Mercy, wildly. "He is murdered, he is dead, and my child an orphan." And so she went on moaning and rocking herself.

"But I tell you he is not dead at all," cried Sir George. "'Tis all a mistake. When did you see him last?"

"More than six weeks ago."

"I mean, when did you hear from him last?"

"Never, since that day."

Sir George groaned aloud at this intelligence.

And Mercy, who heard him groan, was heart-broken. She accused herself of Griffith's death. "'Twas I who drove him from me," said she. "'Twas I who bade him go back to his lawful wife; and the wretch hated him. I sent him to

his death." Her grief was wild, and deep ; she could not hear Sir George's arguments.

But presently she said, sternly, "What does that woman say for herself?"

"Madam," said Sir George, dejectedly, "Heaven knows you are in no condition to fathom a mystery that hath puzzled wiser heads than yours or mine ; and I am but little able to lay the tale before you fairly : for your grief it moves me deeply, and I could curse myself for putting the matter to you so bluntly and uncouthly. Permit me to retire a while, and compose my own spirits for the task I have undertaken too rashly."

"Nay, George Neville," said Mercy, "stay you there: only give me a moment to draw my breath."

She struggled hard for a little composure, and, after a shower of tears, she hung her head over the chair like a crushed thing, but made him a sign of attention.

Sir George told the story as fairly as he could ; only of course his bias was in favour of Mrs. Gaunt ; but as Mercy's bias was against her, this brought the thing nearly square.

When he came to the finding of the body, Mercy was seized with a deadly faintness ; and, though she did not become insensible, yet she was in no condition to judge or even to comprehend.

Sir George was moved with pity, and would have called for help ; but she shook her head. So then he sprinkled water on her face, and slapped her hand : and a beautifully moulded hand it was.

When she got a little better she sobbed faintly, and sobbing thanked him, and begged him to go on.

"My mind is stronger than my heart," she said. "I'll hear it all, though it kill me where I sit."

Sir George went on, and, to avoid repetition, I

must ask the reader to understand that he left out nothing whatever which has been hitherto related in these pages ; and, in fact, told her one or two little things that I have omitted.

When he had done, she sat quite still a minute or two, pale as a statue.

Then she turned to Neville, and said solemnly, " You wish to know the truth in this dark matter : for dark it is in very sooth."

Neville was much impressed by her manner, and answered respectfully, Yes, he desired to know —by all means.

" Then take my hand," said Mercy, " and kneel down with me."

Sir George looked surprised, but obeyed, and kneeled down beside her, with his hand in hers.

There was a long pause, and then took place a transformation.

The dove-like eyes were lifted to Heaven, and gleamed like opals with an inward and celestial



light; the comely face shone with a higher beauty, and the rich voice rose in ardent supplication.

“Thou God, to whom all hearts be known, and no secrets hid from thine eye, look down now on thy servant in sore trouble, that putteth her trust in thee. Give wisdom to the simple this day, and understanding to the lowly. Thou that didst reveal to babes and sucklings the great things that were hidden from the wise, oh show us the truth in this dark matter: enlighten us by thy spirit, for his dear sake, who suffered more sorrows than I suffer now. Amen. Amen.”

Then she looked at Neville: and he said “Amen,” with all his heart, and the tears in his eyes.

He had never heard real live prayer before. Here the little hand gripped his hard, as she wrestled, and the heart seemed to rise out of the bosom and fly to Heaven on the sublime and thrilling voice.

They rose, and she sat down; but it seemed as if her eyes once raised to Heaven in prayer could not come down again: they remained fixed and angelic, and her lips still moved in supplication.

Sir George Neville, though a loose liver, was no scoffer; he was smitten with reverence for this inspired countenance, and retired, bowing low and obsequiously.

He took a long walk and thought it all over. One thing was clear, and consoling. He felt sure he had done wisely to disobey Mrs. Gaunt's instructions, and make a friend of Mercy, instead of trying to set his wits against hers. Ere he returned to the "Packhorse," he had determined to take another step in the right direction. He did not like to agitate her with another interview, so soon. But he wrote her a little letter.

"MADAM,—When I came here, I did not know you; and therefore I feared to trust you too far.

But, now I do know you for the best woman in England, I take the open way with you.

“Know that Mrs. Gaunt said the man would be here with you; and she charged me with a few written lines to him. She would be angry if she knew that I had shown them to any other. Yet I take on me to show them to you: for I believe you are wiser than any of us, if the truth were known. I do therefore entreat you to read these lines, and tell me whether you think the hand that wrote them can have shed the blood of him to whom they are writ.

“I am, Madam,

“With profound respect,

“Your grateful and very humble servant,

“GEORGE NEVILLE.”

He very soon received a line in reply, written in a clear and beautiful handwriting.

“Mercy Vint sends you her duty; and she will

“speak to you at nine of the clock to-morrow morning. Pray for light.”

At the appointed time Sir George found her working with her needle. His letter lay on the table before her.

She rose and curtsied to him, and called the servant to take away the child for a while. She went with her to the door and kissed the bairn several times at parting, as if he was going away for good. “I’m loath to let him go,” said she to Neville; “but it weakens a mother’s mind to have her babe in the room; takes her attention off each moment. Pray you be seated. Well, sir, I have read these lines of Mistress Gaunt, and wept over them. Methinks I had not done so were they cunningly devised. Also I lay all night and thought.”

“That is just what she does.”

“No doubt, sir; and the upshot is, I don’t *feel* as if he was dead. Thank God.”

“That is something,” said Neville. But he could not help thinking it was very little; especially to produce in a court of justice.

“And now,” said she, thoughtfully, “you say that the real Thomas Leicester was seen thereabouts as well as my Thomas Leicester. Then answer me one little question. What had the real Thomas Leicester on his feet that night?”

“Nay, I know not,” was the half-careless reply.

“Bethink you. ’Tis a question that must have been often put in your hearing.”

“Begging your pardon, it was never put at all; nor do I see——”

“What, not at the inquest?”

“No.”

“That is very strange. What, so many wise heads have bent over this riddle, and not one to ask how was yon pedlar shod!”

“Madam,” said Sir George, “our minds were fixed upon the fate of Gaunt. Many did ask how was the pedlar armed; but none how was he shod.”

“Hath he been seen since?”

“Not he; and that hath an ugly look; for the constables are out after him with hue and cry; but he is not to be found.”

“Then,” said Mercy, “I must e’en answer my own question. I do know how that pedlar was shod. WITH HOBNAILED SHOES.”

Sir George bounded from his chair. One great ray of daylight broke in upon him.

“Ay,” said Mercy, “she was right. Women do see clearer in some things than men. The pair went from my house to hers: he you call Griffith Gaunt had on a new pair of boots; and by the same token ’twas I did pay for them, and there is the receipt in that cupboard: he you call Thomas Leicester went hence in hobnailed shoes.

I think the body they found was the body of Thomas Leicester the pedlar. May God have mercy on his poor unprepared soul."

Sir George uttered a joyful exclamation. But the next moment he had a doubt, "Ay, but," said he, "you forget the mole. 'Twas on that they built."

"I forget nought," said Mercy, calmly. "The pedlar had a black mole over his left temple. He showed it me in this very room. You have found the body of Thomas Leicester, and Griffith Gaunt is hiding from the law that he hath broken. He is afeared of her and her friends if he shows his face in Cumberland; he is afeared of my folk if he be seen in Lancashire. Ah, Thomas, as if I would let them harm thee!"

Sir George Neville walked to and fro in grand excitement.

"Oh, blessed day that I came hither. Madam you are an angel. You will save an innocent

broken-hearted lady from death and dishonour. Your good heart and rare wit have read in a moment the dark riddle that hath puzzled a county."

"George," said Mercy, gravely, "you have gotten the wrong end of the stick. The wise in their own conceit are blinded; in Cumberland, where all this befell, they went not to God for light, as you and I did, George."

In saying this she gave him her hand to celebrate their success.

He kissed it devoutly, and owned afterward that it was the proudest moment of his life, when that sweet Puritan gave him her neat hand so cordially, with a pressure so gentle yet frank.

And now came the question how they were to make a Cumberland jury see this matter as they saw it.

He asked her would she come to the trial as a witness?



At that she drew back with manifest repugnance.

“My shame would be public. I must tell who I am; and what. A ruined woman.”

“Say rather an injured saint. You have nothing to be ashamed of. All good men would feel for you.”

Mercy shook her head. “Ay, but the women; shame is shame with us; right or wrong goes for little. Nay, I hope to do better for you than that. I must find *him*: and send him to deliver her. ’Tis his only chance of happiness.”

She then asked him if he would draw up an advertisement of quite a different kind from those he had described to her.

He assented, and between them they concocted the following:—

“If Thomas Leicester, who went from the “Packhorse” two months ago, will come thither

at once, Mercy will be much beholden to him, and tell him strange things that have befallen."

Sir George then, at her request, rode over to Lancaster, and inserted the above in the county paper, and also in a small sheet that was issued in the city three times a week. He had also hand-bills to the same effect printed, and sent into Cumberland and Westmoreland. Finally, he sent a copy to his man of business in London, with orders to insert it in all the journals.

Then he returned to the "Packhorse," and told Mercy what he had done.

The next day he bade her farewell, and away for Carlisle. It was a two days' journey. He reached Carlisle in the evening, and went all glowing to Mrs. Gaunt. "Madam," said he, "be of good cheer. I bless the day I went to see her; she is an angel of wit and goodness." He then related to her, in glowing terms, most that had passed between Mercy and him. But to

his surprise, Mrs. Gaunt wore a cold, forbidding air.

“This is all very well,” said she. “But ’twill avail me little unless *he* comes before the judge and clears me; and she will never let him do that.”

“Ay, that she will—if she can find him.”

“If she can find him? How simple you are.”

“Nay, madam, not so simple but I can tell a good woman from a bad one, and a true from a false.”

“What! when you are in love with her? Not if you were the wisest of your sex.”

“In love with her?” cried Sir George; and coloured high.

“Ay,” said the lady. “Think you I cannot tell? Don’t deceive yourself. You have gone and fallen in love with her. At your years! Not that ’tis any business of mine.”

“Well, madam,” said Sir George, stiffly, “say

what you please on that score; but, at least welcome my good news."

Mrs. Gaunt begged him to excuse her petulance, and thanked him kindly for all he had just done. But the next moment she rose from her chair in great agitation, and burst out, "I'd as lieve die as owe anything to that woman."

Sir George remonstrated. "Why hate her? She does not hate you."

"Oh yes she does. 'Tis not in nature she should do any other."

"Her acts prove the contrary."

"Her acts! she has *done* nothing, but make fair promises; and that has blinded you. Women of this sort are very cunning, and never show their real characters to a man. No more; prithee mention not her name to me. It makes me ill. I know he is with her at this moment. Ah, let me die, and be forgotten: since I am no more beloved."

The voice was sad and weary now, and the tears ran fast.

Poor Sir George was moved and melted, and set himself to flatter and console this impracticable lady, who hated her best friend in this sore strait, for being what she was herself, a woman; and was much less annoyed at being hanged than at not being loved.

When she was a little calmer he left her, and rode off to Houseman. That worthy was delighted. "Get her to swear to those hobnailed shoes," said he, "and we shall shake them." He then let Sir George know that he had obtained private information, which he would use in cross-examining a principal witness for the Crown. "However," he added, "do not deceive yourself: nothing can make the prisoner really safe but the appearance of Griffith Gaunt; he has such strong motives for coming to light; he is heir to a fortune, and his wife is accused of murdering him. The jury

will never believe he is alive till they see him. That man's prolonged disappearance is hideous. It turns my blood cold when I think of it."

"Do not despair on that score," said Neville. "I believe our good angel will produce him."

Three days only before the assizes, came the long-expected letter from Mercy Vint. Sir George tore it open, but bitter was his disappointment. The letter merely said that Griffith had not appeared in answer to her advertisements, and she was sore grieved and perplexed.

There were two postscripts, each on a little piece of paper.

First postscript, in a tremulous hand, "Pray."

Second postscript, in a firm hand, "Drain that water."

Houseman shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Drain the mere? Let the Crown do that. We should but fish up more trouble. And prayer

quo' she! 'Tis not prayers we want, but evidence."

He sent his clerk off to travel post night and day, and subpoena Mercy, and bring her back with him to the trial. She was to have every comfort on the road, and be treated like a duchess.

The evening before the assizes, Mrs. Gaunt's apartments were Mr. Houseman's head-quarters, and messages were coming and going all day, on matters connected with the defence.

Just at sunset, up rattled a postchaise, and the clerk got out and came haggard and bloodshot before his employer.

"The witness has disappeared, sir. Left home last Tuesday, with her child, and has never been seen nor heard of since."

Here was a terrible blow. They all paled under it; it seriously diminished the chances of an acquittal.

But Mrs. Gaunt bore it nobly. She seemed to rise under it.

She turned to Sir George Neville with a sweet smile. "The noble heart sees base things noble. No wonder then an artful woman deluded *you*. He has left England with her ; and condemned me to the gallows. In cold blood. So be it. I shall defend myself."

She then sat down with Mr. Houseman, and went through the written case he had prepared for her : and showed him notes she had taken of full a hundred criminal trials great and small.

While they were putting their heads together, Sir George sat in a brown study, and uttered not a word. Presently he got up a little brusquely, and said, "I'm going to Hernshaw."

"What, at this time of night ? What to do ?"

"To obey my orders. To drain the mere."

"And who could have ordered you to drain my mere ?"



“Merey Vint.”

Sir George uttered this in a very curious way, half ashamed half resolute, and retired before Mrs. Gaunt could vent in speech the surprise and indignation that fired her eye.

Houseman implored her not to heed Sir George and his vagaries, but to bend her whole mind on those approved modes of defence with which he had supplied her.

Being now alone with her, he no longer concealed his great anxiety.

“We have lost an invaluable witness in that woman,” said he. “I was mad to think she would come.”

Mrs. Gaunt shivered with repugnance. “I would not have her come for all the world,” said she. “For Heaven’s sake never mention her name to me. I want help from none but friends. Send Mrs. Houseman to me in the morning; and do not distress yourself so. I shall defend myself

far better than you think. I have not studied a hundred trials for nought.”

Thus the prisoner cheered up her attorney, and soon after insisted on his going home to bed, for she saw he was worn out by his exertions.

And now she was alone.

All was silent.

A few short hours, and she was to be tried for her life; tried, not by the All-wise Judge, but by fallible men, and under a system most unfavourable to the accused.

Worse than all this, she was a Papist: and, as ill-luck would have it, since her imprisonment an alarm had been raised that the Pretender meditated another invasion. This report had set juries very much against all the Romanists in the country, and had already perverted justice in one or two cases, especially in the North.

Mrs. Gaunt knew all this, and trembled at the peril to come.

She spent the early part of the night in studying her defence. Then she laid it quite aside and prayed long and fervently.

Towards morning she fell asleep from exhaustion.

When she awoke, Mrs. Houseman was sitting by her bedside, looking at her, and crying.

They were soon clasped in each other's arms, condoling.

But presently Houseman came, and took his wife away rather angrily.

Mrs. Gaunt was prevailed on to eat a little toast and drink a glass of wine, and then she sat waiting her dreadful summons.

She waited, and waited, until she became impatient to face her danger.

But there were two petty larcenies on before her. She had to wait.

At last, about noon, came a message to say that the grand jury had found a true bill against her.

“Then may God forgive them !” said she.

Soon afterwards she was informed her time drew very near.

She made her toilet carefully, and passed with her attendant into a small room under the court.

Here she had to endure another chilling wait, and in a sombre room.

Presently she heard a voice above her cry out, “The King *versus* Catherine Gaunt.”

Then she was beckoned to.

She mounted some steps, badly lighted, and found herself in the glare of day, and greedy eyes, in the felon’s dock.

In a matter entirely strange, we seldom know beforehand what we can do, and how we shall carry ourselves. Mrs. Gaunt no sooner set her foot in that dock, and saw the awful front of Justice face to face, than her tremors abated, and all her powers awoke, and she thrilled with love of life, and bristled with all those

fine arts of defence that nature lends to superior women.

She entered on that defence before she spoke a word ; for she attacked the prejudices of the court by deportment.

She curtsied reverently to the Judge, and contrived to make her reverence seem a willing homage, unmixed with fear.

She cast her eyes round, and saw the court thronged with ladies and gentlemen she knew. In a moment she read in their faces that only two or three were on her side. She bowed to those only ; and they returned her courtesy. This gave an impression (a false one) that the gentry sympathized with her.

After a little murmur of functionaries, the Clerk of Arraignment turned to the prisoner, and said, in a loud voice, " Catherine Gaunt, hold up thy hand."

She held up her hand, and he recited the indictment, which charged that, not having the fear of

God before her eyes, but being moved by the instigation of the Devil, she had on the fifteen of October, in the tenth year of the reign of his present Majesty, aided and abetted one Thomas Leicester in an assault upon one Griffith Gaunt, Esq., and him, the said Griffith Gaunt, did with force and arms assassinate and do to death, against the peace of our said Lord the King, his crown and dignity.

After reading the indictment, the Clerk of Arraighs turned to the prisoner, "How sayest thou, Catherine Gaunt, art thou guilty of the felony and murder whereof thou standest indicted—or not guilty?"

"I am not guilty."

"Culprit, how wilt thou be tried?"

"Culprit I am none, but only accused: I will be tried by God and my country."

"God send thee a good deliverance."

Mr. Whitworth, the junior counsel for the Crown,

then rose to open the case ; but the prisoner, with a pale face, but most courteous demeanour, begged his leave to make a previous motion to the court. Mr. Whitworth bowed, and sat down. “My Lord,” said she, “I have first a favour to ask : and that favour, methinks, you will grant, since it is but justice, impartial justice. My accuser, I hear, has too counsel ; both learned and able. I am but a woman, and no match for their skill ; therefore, I beg your Lordship to allow me counsel on my defence, to matter of fact as well as of law. I know this is not usual ; but it is just ; and I am informed it has sometimes been granted in trials of life and death, and that your Lordship hath the *power*, if you have the *will*, to do me so much justice.”

The Judge looked towards Mr. Serjeant Wiltshire, who was the leader on the other side : he rose instantly and replied to this purpose : “The prisoner is misinformed. The truth is, that

from time immemorial, and down to the other day, a person indicted for a capital offence was never allowed counsel at all, except to matters of law, and these must be started by himself. By recent practice, the rule hath been so far relaxed, that counsel have sometimes been permitted to examine, and cross-examine, witnesses for a prisoner ; but never to make observations on the evidence, nor to draw inferences from it to the point in issue."

*Mrs. Gaunt.* So, then, if I be sued for a small sum of money, I may have skilled orators to defend me against their like. But, if I be sued for my life and honour, I may not oppose skill to skill ; but must stand here a child against you that are masters. 'Tis a monstrous iniquity, and you yourself, sir, will not deny it.

*Serjeant Wiltshire.* Madam, permit me : whether it be a hardship to deny full counsel to prisoners in criminal cases, I shall not pretend to say ; but



if it be, 'tis a hardship of the law's making, and not of mine, nor of my lord's: and none have suffered by it (at least in our day) but those who had broken the law.

The Serjeant then stopped a minute, and whispered with his junior. After which he turned to the Judge. "My Lord, we, that are of counsel for the Crown, desire to do nothing that is hard where a person's life is at stake. We yield to the prisoner any indulgence for which your Lordship can find a precedent in your reading; but no more: and so we leave the matter to you."

*The Clerk of Arraignment.* Crier, proclaim silence.

*The Crier.* Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! His Majesty's Justices do straitly charge all manner of persons to keep silence on pain of imprisonment.

*The Judge.* Prisoner, what my brother Wiltshire says, the law is clear in: there is no precedent for what you ask, and the contrary practice stares us in the face for centuries. What seems to you

a partial practice, and, to be frank, some learned persons are of your mind, must be set against this, that in capital cases the burden of proof lies on the Crown and not on the accused. Also it is my duty to give you all the assistance I can, and that I shall do. Thus then it is: you can be allowed counsel to examine your own witnesses, and cross-examine the witnesses for the Crown, and speak to points of law, to be started by yourself,—but no further.

He then asked her what gentleman there present he should assign to her for counsel.

Her reply to this inquiry took the whole court by surprise, and made her solicitor, Houseman, very miserable. “None, my Lord,” said she. “Half justice is injustice; and I will lend it no colour. I will not set able men to fight for me with their hands tied, against men as able whose hands be free. Counsel, on terms so partial, I will have none. My counsel shall be three, and no

more. Yourself, my Lord,—my Innocence,—and the Lord God Omniscient.”

These words, grandly uttered, caused a dead silence in the court, but only for a few moments. It was broken by the loud mechanical voice of the crier, who proclaimed silence, and then called the names of the jury that were to try this cause.

Mrs. Gaunt listened keenly to the names; familiar and bourgeois names, that now seemed regal, for they who owned them held her life in their hands.

Each juryman was sworn in the grand old form, now slightly curtailed.

“Joseph King, look upon the prisoner.—You shall well and truly try, and true deliverance make, between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, whom you shall have in charge, and a true verdict give, according to the evidence. So help you God.”

Mr. Whitworth, for the Crown, then opened the

case, but did little more than translate the indictment into more rational language.

He sat down, and Serjeant Wiltshire addressed the court somewhat after this fashion :—

“ May it please your Lordship, and you, gentlemen of the jury, this is a case of great expectation and importance. The prisoner at the bar, a gentlewoman by birth and education, and, as you must have already perceived, by breeding also, stands indicted for no less a crime than murder.

“ I need not paint to you the heinousness of this crime : you have but to consult your own breasts. Who ever saw the ghastly corpse of the victim weltering in its blood, and did not feel his own blood run cold through his veins? Has the murderer fled? with what eagerness do we pursue! with what zeal apprehend! with what joy do we bring him to justice! Even the dreadful sentence of death does not shock us, when pronounced upon him; we hear it with solemn satisfaction; and

acknowledge the justice of the divine sentence, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'

"But if this be the case in every common murder, what shall be thought of her who has murdered her husband? the man in whose arms she has lain and whom she has sworn at God's altar to love and cherish. Such a murderer is a robber as well as an assassin; for she robs her own children of their father, that tender parent, who can never be replaced in this world.

"Gentlemen, it will, I fear, be proved that the prisoner at the bar hath been guilty of murder in this high degree: and, though I will endeavour rather to extenuate than to aggravate, yet I trust (sic) I have such a history to open as will shock the ears of all who hear me.

"Mr. Griffith Gaunt, the unfortunate deceased, was a man of descent and worship. As to his character, it was inoffensive; he was known as a

worthy kindly gentleman ; deeply attached to her who now stands accused of his murder. They lived happily together for some years ; but, unfortunately, there was a thorn in the rose of their wedded life ; he was of the Church of England ; she was, and is, a Roman Catholic. This led to disputes : and no wonder ; since the same unhappy difference hath more than once embroiled a nation, let alone a single family.

“Well, gentlemen, about a year ago there was a more violent quarrel than usual between the deceased and the prisoner at the bar : and the deceased left his home for several months.

“He returned upon a certain day in this year, and a reconciliation, real or apparent, took place. He left home again soon afterwards, but only for a short period. On the 15th of last October he suddenly returned for good, as he intended : and here begins the tragedy, to which what I have hitherto related was but the prologue.

“Scarce an hour before he came, one Thomas Leicester entered the house. Now this Thomas Leicester was a creature of the prisoner’s. He had been her gamekeeper; and was now a pedlar. It was the prisoner who set him up as a pedlar, and purchased the wares to start him in his trade.

“Gentlemen, this pedlar, as I shall prove, was concealed in the house when the deceased arrived. One Caroline Ryder, who is the prisoner’s gentlewoman, was the person who first informed her of Leicester’s arrival, and it seems she was much moved; Mrs. Ryder will tell you she fell into hysterics. But, soon after, her husband’s arrival was announced, and then the passion was of a very different kind. So violent was her rage against this unhappy man that, for once, she forgot all prudence, and threatened his life before a witness. Yes, gentlemen, we shall prove that this gentlewoman, who in appearance and manners might

grace a court, was so transported out of her usual self that she held up a knife—a knife, gentlemen, and vowed to put it into her husband's heart. And this was no mere temporary ebullition of wrath; we shall see presently that, long after she had time to cool, she repeated this menace to the unfortunate man's face. The first threat, however was uttered in her own bedroom, before her confidential servant, Caroline Ryder aforesaid. But now the scene shifts. She has, to all appearance, recovered herself, and sits smiling at the head of her table; for, you must know, she entertained company that night, persons of the highest standing in the county.

“Presently her husband, all unconscious of the terrible sentiments she entertained towards him, and the fearful purpose she had announced, enters the room, makes obeisance to his guests, and goes to take his wife's hand.

“What does she? She draws back with so



strange a look and such forbidding words, that the company were disconcerted. Consternation fell on all present; and, ere long, they made their excuses, and left the house. Thus the prisoner was left alone with her husband. But, meantime, curiosity had been excited by her strange conduct, and some of the servants, with foreboding hearts, listened at the door of the dining-room. What did they hear, gentlemen? A furious quarrel, in which, however, the deceased was comparatively passive, and the prisoner again threatened his life, with vehemence. Her passion, it is clear, had not cooled.

“Now it may fairly be alleged, on behalf of the prisoner, that, the witnesses for the Crown were on one side of the door, the prisoner and the deceased on the other; and that such evidence should be received with caution. I grant this—where it is not sustained by other circumstances, or by direct proofs. Let us then give the prisoner

the benefit of this doubt, and let us inquire how the deceased himself understood her ; he who not only heard the words, and the accents, but saw the looks, whatever they were, that accompanied them.

“Gentlemen, he was a man of known courage and resolution ; yet he was found after this terrible interview, much cowed and dejected. He spoke to Mrs. Ryder of his death as an event not far distant, and so went to his bedroom in a melancholy and foreboding state : and where was that bedroom ? He was thrust by his wife’s orders into a small chamber, and not allowed to enter hers : he, the master of the house, her husband, and her lord.

“But his interpretation of the prisoner’s words did not end there. He left us a further comment by his actions next ensuing. He dared not (I beg pardon, this is my inference ; receive it as such), he *did* not, remain in that house a single night.

He bolted his chamber-door inside ; and in the very dead of night, notwithstanding the fatigues of the day's journey (for he had ridden some distance), he let himself out by the window, and reached the ground safely, though it was a height of fourteen feet ; a leap, gentlemen, that few of us would venture to take. But what will not men risk when destruction is at their heels ? He did not wait even to saddle his horse ; but fled on foot. Unhappy man, he fled from danger, and met his death.

“ From the hour when he went up to bed none of the inmates of the house ever saw Griffith Gaunt alive ; but one Thomas Hayes, a labourer, saw him walking in a certain direction at one o'clock that morning ; and behind him, gentlemen, there walked another man.

“ Who was that other man ?

“ When I have told you (and this is an essential feature of the case) how the prisoner was employed

during the time that her husband lay quaking in his little room, waiting an opportunity to escape, —when I tell you this, I fear you will divine who it was that followed the deceased, and for what purpose.

“Gentlemen, when the prisoner had threatened her husband in person, as I have described, she retired to her own room, but not to sleep. She ordered her maid, Mrs. Ryder, to bring Thomas Leicester to her chamber. Yes, gentlemen, she received this pedlar at midnight in her bed-chamber.

“Now, an act so strange as this admits, I think, of but two interpretations. Either she had a guilty amour with this fellow, or she had some extraordinary need of his services. Her whole character, by consent of the witnesses, renders it very improbable that she would descend to a low amour. Moreover she acted too publicly in the matter. The man, as we know, was her tool, her creature :

she had bought his wares for him, and set him up as a pedlar. She openly summoned him to her presence, and kept him there about half-an-hour.

“He went from her, and very soon after is seen, by Thomas Hayes, following Griffith Gaunt—at one o’clock in the morning—that Griffith Gaunt, who, after that hour, was never seen alive.

“Gentlemen, up to this point the evidence is clear, connected, and cogent; but it rarely happens in cases of murder that any human eye sees the very blow struck. The penalty is too severe for such an act to be done in the presence of an eye-witness: and not one murderer in ten could be convicted without the help of circumstantial evidence.

“The next link, however, is taken up by an ear-witness, and, in some cases, the ear is even better than the eye; for instance, as to the discharge of firearms: for, by the eye alone, we could not positively tell whether a pistol had gone off or had

but flashed in the pan. Well, then, gentlemen, a few minutes after Mr. Gaunt was last seen alive, which was by Thomas Hayes, Mrs. Ryder, who had retired to her bedroom, heard the said Gaunt distinctly cry for help: she also heard a pistol-shot discharged. This took place by the side of a lake or large pond near the house, called ‘the mere.’ Mrs. Ryder alarmed the house, and she and the other servants proceeded to her master’s room: they found it bolted from the inside. They broke it open. Mr. Gaunt had escaped by the window, as I have already told you.

“Presently in comes the prisoner from out of doors. This is at one o’clock in the morning. Now she appears to have seen at once that she must explain her being abroad at that time, so she told Mrs. Ryder that she had been out—praying.”

(Here some people laughed harshly; but were threatened severely, and silenced).

“Is that credible? Do people go out of doors

at one o'clock in the morning, to pray? Nay; but I fear it was to do an act, that years of prayer and penitence cannot efface.

“From that moment Mr. Gaunt was seen no more among living men. And what made his disappearance the more mysterious was that he had actually at this time just inherited largely from his namesake Mr. Gaunt of Coggleswade; and his own interest, and that of the other legatees, required his immediate presence. Mr. Atkins, the testator's solicitor, advertised for this unfortunate gentleman; but he did not appear to claim his fortune. Then plain men began to put this and that together, and cried out ‘foul play!’

“Justice was set in motion at last: but embarrassed by the circumstance that the body of the deceased could not be found.

“At last, Mr. Atkins, the solicitor, being unable to get the estate I have mentioned administered, for want of proof of Griffith Gaunt's decease,

entered heartily into this affair, on mere civil grounds. He asked the prisoner, before several witnesses, if she would permit him to drag that piece of water by the side of which Mr. Gaunt was heard to cry for help, and, after that, seen no more.

“The prisoner did not reply; but Mr. Houseman, her solicitor, a very worthy man, who has I believe, or had, up to that moment, a sincere conviction of her innocence, answered for her, and told Mr. Atkins he was welcome to drag or drain it. Then the prisoner said nothing. She fainted away.

“After this, you may imagine with what expectation the water was dragged. Gentlemen, after hours of fruitless labour, a body was found.

“But here an unforeseen circumstance befriended the prisoner. It seems that piece of water swarms with enormous pike and other ravenous fish. These had so horribly mutilated the deceased, that neither form nor feature remained to swear



by: and, as the law wisely and humanely demands that in these cases a body shall be identified beyond doubt, justice bade fair to be baffled again. But lo! as often happens in case of murder, Providence interposed and pointed with unerring finger to a slight but infallible mark. The deceased gentleman was known to have a large mole over his left temple. It had been noticed by his servants, and his neighbours. Well, gentlemen, the greedy fish had spared this mole; spared it perhaps by His command who bade the whale swallow Jonah, yet not destroy him. There it was, clear and infallible. It was examined by several witnesses; it was recognized; it completed that chain of evidence, some of it direct, some of it circumstantial, which I have laid before you very briefly, and every part of which I shall now support by credible witnesses."

He called thirteen witnesses, including Mr.

Atkins, Thomas Hayes, Jane Bannister, Caroline Ryder, and others, and their evidence in chief bore out every positive statement the counsel had made.

In cross-examining these witnesses Mrs. Gaunt took a line that agreeably surprised the court. It was not for nothing she had studied a hundred trials with a woman's observation and patient docility. She had found out how badly people plead their own causes, and had noticed the reasons; one of which is that they say too much, and stray from the point. The line she took, with one exception, was keen brevity.

She cross-examined Thomas Hayes as follows :

## CHAPTER XI.

“You say the pedlar was a hundred yards behind my husband. Which of the two men was walking fastest?”

Thomas Hayes considered a moment. “Well, I think the Squire was walking rather the smartest of the two.”

“Did the pedlar seem likely to overtake him?”

“Nay. Ye see, Dame, Squire he walked straight on; but the pedlar he took both sides of the road at onst, as the saying is.”

*The Prisoner.* Forgive me, Thomas, but I don’t know what you mean.

*Hayes* (compassionately). How should ye?

You are never the worse for liquor, the likes of you.

*The Prisoner* (very keenly). Oh, he was in liquor, was he?

*Hayes*. Come, Dame, you do brew good ale at Hernshaw Castle. Ye needn't go to deny that; for, Lord knows, 'tis no sin; and a poor fellow may be jolly; yet not, to say, drunk.

*The Judge* (sternly). Witness, attend, and answer directly.

*The Prisoner*. Nay, my lord, 'tis a plain country body, and means no ill. Good Thomas, be so much my friend as to answer plainly. Was the man drunk or sober?

*Hayes*. All I know is he went from one side of the road to t'other.

*The Prisoner*. Thomas Hayes, as you hope to be saved eternally, was the pedlar drunk or sober?

*Hayes*. Well, if I must tell on my neighbour or

else be damned, then that there pedlar was as drunk as a lord.

Here, notwithstanding the nature of the trial, the laughter was irrepressible, and Mrs. Gaunt sat quietly down (for she was allowed a seat), and said no more.

To the surgeon, who had examined the body officially, she put this question, "Did you find any signs of violence?"

*The Surgeon.* None whatever; but, then, there was nothing to go by, except the head and the bones.

*The Prisoner.* Have you experience in this kind? I mean, have you inspected murdered bodies?

*The Surgeon.* Yes.

*The Prisoner.* How many?

*The Surgeon.* Two before this.

*The Prisoner.* Oh! pray, pray, do not say "before this:" I have great hopes no murder at

all hath been committed here. Let us keep to plain cases. Please you describe the injuries in those two undoubted cases.

*The Surgeon.* In Wellyn's the skull was fractured in two places. In Sherrett's the right arm was broken, and there were some contusions on the head; but the cause of death was a stab that penetrated the lungs.

*The Prisoner.* Suppose Wellyn's murderers had thrown his body into the water, and the fishes had so mutilated it as they have this one, could you by your art have detected the signs of violence?

*The Surgeon.* Certainly. The man's skull was fractured. Wellyn's I mean.

*The Prisoner.* I put the same question with regard to Sherrett's.

*The Surgeon.* I cannot answer it: here the lungs were devoured by the fishes: no signs of lesion can be detected in an organ that has ceased to exist.

*The Prisoner.* This is too partial. Why select one injury out of several? What I ask is this: could you have detected violence in Sherrett's case, although the fishes had eaten the flesh of his body.

*The Surgeon.* I answer that the minor injuries of Sherrett would have been equally perceptible; to wit, the bruises on the head, and the broken arm; but not the perforation of the lungs; and that it was killed the man.

*Prisoner.* Then, so far as you know, and can swear, about murder, more blows have always been struck than one, and some of the blows struck in Sherrett's case, and Wellyn's, would have left traces that fishes' teeth could not efface?

*The Surgeon.* That is so, if I am to be peevishly confined to my small and narrow experience of murdered bodies. But my general knowledge of the many ways in which life may be taken by violence——

The Judge stopped him, and said that, in a case of Blood, that could hardly be admitted as evidence against his actual experience.

The prisoner put a drawing of the castle, the mere, and the bridge, into the witnesses' hands, and elicited that it was correct, and also the distances marked on it. They had, in fact, been measured exactly for her.

The hobnailed shoes were produced, and she made some use of them, particularly in cross-examining Jane Bannister.

*Prisoner.* Look at those shoes. Saw you ever the like on Mr. Gaunt's feet?

*Jane.* That I never did, Dame.

*Prisoner.* What, not when he came into the kitchen on the 15th October?

*Jane.* Nay, he was booted. By the same token I saw the boy a cleaning of them for supper.

*Prisoner.* Those boots, when you broke into his room, did you find them?



*Jane.* Nay, when the man went, his boots went; as reason was. We found nought of his but a soiled glove.

*Prisoner.* Had the pedlar boots on?

*Jane.* Alas! who ever see'd a booted pedlar?

*Prisoner.* Had he these very shoes on. Look at them.

*Jane.* I couldn't say for that. He had shoon, for they did properly clatter on my bricks.

*The Judge.* Clatter on her bricks! What does she mean?

*Prisoner.* I think she means on the floor of her kitchen. 'Tis a brick floor, if I remember right.

*The Judge.* Good woman, say, is that what you mean?

*Jane.* Ay, an't please you, my lord.

*Prisoner.* Had the pedlar a mole on his forehead?

*Jane.* Not that I know on. I never took so

much notice of the man. But la, Dame, now I look at you, I don't believe you was ever the one to murder our master.

*Wiltshire.* We don't want your opinion. Confine yourself to facts.

*Prisoner.* You heard me rating my husband on that night; what was it I said about the constables—do you remember?

*Jane.* La, Dame, I wouldn't ask that if I was in your place.

*Prisoner.* I am much obliged to you for your advice; but answer me—truly.

*Jane.* Well, if you will have it, I think you said they should be here in the morning. But, indeed, good gentlemen, her bark was always worse than her bite, poor soul.

*The Judge.* Here. That meant at Hernshaw Castle, I presume.

*Jane.* Ay, my lord, an' if it please your lordship's honour's worship.

Mrs. Gaunt, husbanding the patience of the court, put no questions at all to several witnesses ; but she cross-examined Mrs. Ryder very closely. This was necessary ; for Ryder was a fatal witness. Her memory had stored every rash and hasty word the poor lady had uttered, and, influenced either by animosity or prejudice, she put the worst colour on every suspicious circumstance. She gave her damnatory evidence neatly, and clearly, and with a seeming candour and regret, that disarmed suspicion.

When her examination in chief concluded, there was but one opinion amongst the bar, and the auditors in general, viz., that the maid had hung the mistress.

Mrs. Gaunt herself felt she had a terrible antagonist to deal with, and, when she rose to cross-examine her, she looked paler than she had done all through the trial.

She rose, but seemed to ask herself how to

begin: and her pallor and her hesitation, while they excited some little sympathy, confirmed the unfavourable impression. She fixed her eyes upon the witnesses, as if to discover where she was most vulnerable. Mrs. Ryder returned her gaze calmly. The court was hushed; for it was evident a duel was coming between two women of no common ability.

The opening rather disappointed expectation. Mrs. Gaunt seemed, by her manner, desirous to propitiate the witness.

*Prisoner* (very civilly). You say you brought Thomas Leicester to my bedroom on that terrible night?

*Ryder* (civilly). Yes, madam.

*Prisoner*. And you say he stayed there half-an-hour?

*Ryder*. Yes, madam; he did.

*Prisoner*. May I inquire how you know he stayed just half-an-hour?

*Ryder.* My watch told me that, madam. I brought him to you at a quarter past eleven : and you did not ring for me till a quarter to twelve.

*Prisoner.* And, when I did ring for you, what then ?

*Ryder.* I came and took the man away, by your orders.

*Prisoner.* At a quarter to twelve ?

*Ryder.* At a quarter to twelve.

*Prisoner.* This Leicester was a lover of yours ?

*Ryder.* Not he.

*Prisoner.* Oh, fie ! Why he offered you marriage ; it went so far as that.

*Ryder.* Oh, that was before you set him up pedlar.

*Prisoner.* 'Twas so, but he was single for your sake, and he renewed his offer that very night. Come, do not forswear yourself about a trifle.

*Ryder.* Trifle, indeed ! Why, if he did, what

has that to do with the murder? You'll do yourself no good, madam, by going about so.

*Wiltshire.* Really, madam, this is beside the mark.

*Prisoner.* If so, it can do your case no harm. My lord, you did twice interrupt the learned counsel, and forebade him to lead his witnesses; I not once, for I am for stopping no mouths, but sifting all to the bottom. Now, I implore you to let me have fair play in my turn, and an answer from this slippery witness.

*The Judge.* Prisoner, I do not quite see your drift; but God forbid you should be hampered in your defence. Witness, by virtue of your oath, reply directly. Did this pedlar offer you marriage that night after he left the prisoner?

*Ryder.* My lord, he did.

*Prisoner.* And confided to you he had orders to kill Mr. Gaunt?

*Ryder.* Not he, madam: that was not the way to win *me*.

*Prisoner.* What! did not his terrible purpose peep out all the time he was making love to you?

No reply.

*Prisoner.* You had the kitchen to your two selves? Come, don't hesitate.

*Ryder.* The other servants were gone to bed. You kept the man so late.

*Prisoner.* Oh, I mean no reflection on your prudence. You went out of doors with your wooer; just to see him off?

*Ryder.* Not I. What for? *I* had nobody to make away with. I just opened the door for him, bolted it after him, and went straight to my bedroom.

*Prisoner.* How long had you been there when you heard the cry for help?

*Ryder.* Scarce ten minutes. I had not taken my stays off.

*Prisoner.* If you and Thomas Hayes speak true, that gives half an hour you were making love with the murderer after he left me. Am I correct?

The witness now saw whither she had been led, and changed her manner : she became sullen, and watched an opportunity to stab.

*Prisoner.* Had he a mole on his brow?

*Ryder.* Not that I know of.

*Prisoner.* Why, where were your eyes, then, when the murderer saluted you at parting?

Ryder's eyes flashed; but she felt her temper tried, and governed it all the more severely. She treated the question with silent contempt.

*Prisoner.* But you pass for a discreet woman; perhaps you looked modestly down when the assassin saluted you?

*Ryder.* If he saluted me, *perhaps* I did.

*Prisoner.* In that case you could not see his mole; but you must have noticed his shoes.



Were these the shoes he wore? Look at them well.

*Ryder* (after inspecting them). I do not recognise them.

*Prisoner.* Will you swear these were not the shoes he had on?

*Ryder.* How can I swear that? I know nothing about the man's shoes. If you please, my lord, am I to be kept here all day with her foolish trifling questions?

*The Judge.* All day, and all night too, if Justice requires it. The law is not swift to shed blood.

*Prisoner.* My lord and the gentlemen of the jury were here before you, and will be kept here after you. Prithee attend. Look at that drawing of Hernshaw Castle and Hernshaw Mere. Now take this pencil, and mark your bedroom on the drawing,

The pencil was taken from the prisoner, and handed to Ryder. She waited like a cat till it

came close to her; then recoiled with an admirable scream. "Me handle a thing hot from the hand of a murderess! It makes me tremble all over."

This cruel stab affected the prisoner visibly. She put her hand to her bosom, and with tears in her eyes faltered out a request to the judge that she might sit down a minute.

*The Judge.* To be sure you may. And you, my good woman, must not run before the court. How do you know what evidence she may have in store? At present we have only heard one side. Be more moderate.

The prisoner rose promptly to her feet. "My lord, I welcome the insult that has disgusted your lordship and the gentlemen of the jury, and won me those good words of comfort." To Ryder—"What sort of a night was it?"

*Ryder.* Very little moon, but a clear, starry night.

*Prisoner.* Could you see the Mere, and the banks

*Ryder.* Nay, but so much of it as faced my window.

*Prisoner.* Have you marked your window?

*Ryder.* I have.

*Prisoner.* Now mark the place where you heard Mr. Gaunt cry for help.

*Ryder.* 'Twas about here; under these trees. And that is why I could not see him: along of the shadow.

*Prisoner.* Possibly. Did you see me on that side the Mere?

*Ryder.* No.

*Prisoner.* What coloured dress had I on at that time?

*Ryder.* White satin.

*Prisoner.* Then you could have seen me, even among the trees, had I been on that side the Mere?

*Ryder.* I can't say. However, I never said you were on the very spot where the deed was done ; but you were out of doors.

*Prisoner.* How do you know that ?

*Ryder.* Why, you told me so yourself.

*Prisoner.* Then that is my evidence, not yours. Swear to no more than you know. Had my husband, to your knowledge, a reason for absconding suddenly ?

*Ryder.* Yes, he had.

*Prisoner.* What was it ?

*Ryder.* Fear of you.

*Prisoner.* Nay, I mean, had he not something to fear, something quite different from that I am charged with ?

*Ryder.* You know best, madam. I would gladly serve you, but I cannot guess what you are driving at.

The prisoner was taken aback by this impudent reply. She hesitated to force her servant to

expose a husband, whom she believed to be living : and her hesitation looked like discomfiture ; and Ryder was victorious in that encounter.

By this time they were both thoroughly embittered, and it was war to the knife.

*Prisoner.* You listened to our unhappy quarrel that night ?

*Ryder.* Quarrel ! madam, 'twas all on one side.

*Prisoner.* How did you understand what I said to him about the constables ?

*Ryder.* Constables ! I never heard you say the word.

*Prisoner.* Oh !

*Ryder.* Neither when you threatened him with your knife to me ; nor when you threatened him to his face.

*Prisoner.* Take care : you forget that Jane Bannister heard me ; was her ear nearer the key-hole than yours ?

*Ryder.* Jane ! she is a simpleton. You could

make her think she heard anything. I noticed you put the words in her mouth.

*Prisoner.* God forgive you, you naughty woman. You had better have spoken the truth.

*Ryder.* My lord, if you please, am I to be miscalled—by a murderess?

*The Judge.* Come, come, this is no place for recrimination.

The prisoner now stooped and examined her papers, and took a distinct line of cross-examination.

*Prisoner* (with apparent carelessness). At all events, you are a virtuous woman, Mrs. Ryder?

*Ryder.* Yes, madam, as virtuous as yourself, to say the least.

*Prisoner* (still more carelessly). Married or single?

*Ryder.* Single, and like to be.

*Prisoner.* Yes, if I remember right, I made a point of that before I engaged you as my maid.

*Ryder.* I believe the question was put.

*Prisoner.* Here is the answer in your handwriting. Is not that your handwriting?

*Ryder* (after inspecting it). It is.

*Prisoner.* You came highly recommended by your last mistress, a certain Mrs. Hamilton. Here is her letter, describing you as a model.

*Ryder.* Well, madam, hitherto I have given satisfaction to all my mistresses, Mrs. Hamilton among the rest. My character does not rest on her word only, I hope.

*Prisoner.* Excuse me; I engaged you on her word alone. Now, who is this Mrs. Hamilton?

*Ryder.* A worshipful lady I served for eight months before I came to you. She went abroad, or I should be with her now.

*Prisoner.* Now cast your eye over this paper.

It was the copy of a marriage certificate between Thomas Edwards and Caroline Plunkett.

“Who is this Caroline Plunkett?”

Ryder turned very pale, and made no reply.

“I ask you who is this Caroline Plunkett?”

*Ryder* (faintly). Myself.

*The Judge*. Why, you said you were single!

*Ryder*. So I am; as good as single. My husband and me we parted eight years ago, and I have never seen him since.

*Prisoner*. Was it quite eight years ago?

*Ryder*. Nearly, 'twas in May, 1739.

*Prisoner*. But you have lived with him since.

*Ryder*. Never, upon my soul.

*Prisoner*. When was your child born?

*Ryder*. My child! I have none.

*Prisoner*. In January, 1743, you left a baby at Biggleswade, with a woman called Church—did you not?

*Ryder* (panting). Of course I did. It was my sister's.

*Prisoner*. Do you mean to call God to witness that child was not yours?



Ryder hesitated.

*Prisoner.* Will you swear Mrs. Church did not see you nurse that child in secret, and weep over it?

At this question the perspiration stood visible on Ryder's brow, her checks were ghastly, and her black eyes roved like some wild animal's round the court. She saw her own danger, and had no means of measuring her inquisitor's information.

"My lord, have pity on me. I was betrayed, abandoned. Why am I so tormented? *I* have not committed murder." So, catlike, she squealed and scratched at once.

*Prisoner.* What! to swear away an innocent life, is not that murder?

*The Judge.* Prisoner, we make allowances for your sex, and your peril, but you must not remark on the evidence at present. Examine as severely as you will, but abstain from comment till you address the jury on your defence.

*Serjeant Wiltshire.* My lord, I submit that this line of examination is barbarous, and travels out of the case entirely.

*Prisoner.* Not so, Mr. Serjeant. 'Tis done by advice of an able lawyer. My life is in peril unless I shake this witness's credit. To that end I show you she is incontinent, and practised in falsehood. Unchastity has been held in these courts to disqualify a female witness, hath it not, my lord?

*The Judge.* Hardly. But to disparage her evidence it has. And wisely; for she who loses her virtue enters on a life of deceit; and lying is a habit that spreads from one thing to many. Much wisdom there is in ancient words. Our forefathers taught us to call a virtuous woman an honest woman, and the law does but follow in that track; still, however, leaving much to the discretion of the jury.

*Prisoner.* I would show her more mercy than

she has shown to me. Therefore I leave that matter. Witness, be so good as to examine Mrs. Hamilton's letter, and compare it with your own. The "y's" and the "s's" are peculiar in both, and yet the same. Come, confess; Mrs. Hamilton's is a forgery. You wrote it. Be pleased to hand both letters up to my lord to compare; the disguise is but thin.

*Ryder.* Forgery there was none. There is no Mrs. Hamilton. (She burst into tears.) I had my child to provide for, and no man to help me! What was I to do? A servant must live.

*Prisoner.* Then why not let her mistress live, whose bread she has eaten? My lord, shall not this false witness be sent hence to prison for perjury?

*Wiltshire.* Certainly not. What woman on earth is expected to reveal her own shame upon oath? 'Twas not fair nor human to put such questions. Come, madam, leave torturing this

poor creature. Show some mercy; you may need it yourself.

*The Prisoner.* Sir, 'tis not mercy I ask, but justice according to law. But, since you do me the honour to make me a request, I will comply, and ask her but one question more. Describe my apartment into which you showed Thomas Leicester that night. Begin at the outer door.

*Ryder.* First there is the ante-room; then the boudoir; then there's your bed-chamber.

*Prisoner.* Into which of those three did you show Thomas Leicester?

*Ryder.* Into the ante-room.

*Prisoner.* Then why did you say it was in my chamber I entertained him?

*Ryder.* Madam, I meant no more than that it was your private apartment upstairs.

*Prisoner.* You contrived to make the gentlemen think otherwise.

*The Judge.* That you did. 'Tis down in my

notes that she received the pedlar in her bed-chamber.

*Ryder* (sobbing). God is my witness I did not mean to mislead your lordship: and I ask my lady's pardon for not being more exact in that particular.

At this the prisoner bowed to the judge, and sat down with one victorious flash of her grey eye at the witness, who was in an abject condition of fear, and hung all about the witness-box limp as a wet towel.

Serjeant Wiltshire saw she was so thoroughly cowed she would be apt to truckle, and soften her evidence to propitiate the prisoner; so he asked her but one question.

“Were you and the prisoner on good terms?”

*Ryder*. On the best of terms. She was always a good and liberal mistress to me.

*Wiltshire*. I will not prolong your sufferings. You may go down.

*The Judge.* But you will not leave the court till this trial is ended. I have grave doubts whether I ought not to commit you.

Unfortunately for the prisoner, Ryder was not the last witness for the Crown. The others that followed were so manifestly honest that it would have been impolitic to handle them severely. The prisoner, therefore, put very few questions to them; and, when the last witness went down, the case looked very formidable.

The evidence for the Crown being now complete, the judge retired for some refreshment; and the court buzzed like a hum of bees. Mrs. Gaunt's lips and throat were parched; and her heart quaked.

A woman of quite the lower order thrust forth a great arm, and gave her an orange. Mrs. Gaunt thanked her sweetly: and the juice relieved her throat.

Also this bit of sympathy was of good omen, and did her heart good.

She buried her face in her hands, and collected all her powers for the undertaking before her. She had noted down the exact order of her topics, but no more.

The judge returned; the crier demanded silence; and the prisoner rose, and turned her eyes modestly but steadily upon those who held her life in their hands: and, true to the wisdom of her sex, the first thing she aimed at was—to please.

“My lord, and you gentlemen of the jury, I am now to reply to a charge of murder, founded on a little testimony, and a good deal of false, but, I must needs say, reasonable conjecture.

“I am innocent; but unlike other innocent persons who have stood here before me, I have no man to complain of.

“The magistrates who committed me pro-

ceeded with due caution and humanity: they weighed my hitherto unspotted reputation, and were in no hurry to prejudge me; here, in this court, I have met with much forbearance; the learned counsel for the Crown has made me groan under his abilities; that was his duty; but he said from the first he would do nothing hard, and he has kept his word; often he might have stopped me; I saw it in his face: but, being a gentleman and a Christian, as well as a learned lawyer, methinks he said to himself, ‘this is a poor gentlewoman pleading for her life; let her have some little advantage.’ As for my lord, he has promised to be my counsel, so far as his high station, and duty to the Crown, admit; and he has supported and consoled me more than once with words of justice, that would not, I think, have encouraged a guilty person, but have comforted and sustained me beyond expression. So then I stand here, the victim, not of man’s in-



justice, but of deceitful appearances, and of honest, but hasty and loose conjectures.

: “These conjectures I shall now sift, and hope to show you how hollow they are.

“Gentlemen, in every disputed matter the best way, I am told, is to begin by settling what both parties are agreed in, and so to narrow the matter. To use that way, then, I do heartily agree with the learned counsel that murder is a heinous crime, and that, black as it is at the best, yet it is still more detestable when ’tis a wife that murders her husband, and robs her child of a parent who can never be replaced.

“I also agree with him that circumstantial evidence is often sufficient to convict a murderer; and, indeed, were it not so, that most monstrous of crimes would go oftenest unpunished: since, of all culprits, murderers do most shun the eyes of men in their dark deeds, and so provide beforehand that direct testimony to their execrable

crime there shall be none. Only herein I am advised to take a distinction that escaped the learned serjeant; I say that first of all it ought to be proved directly, and to the naked eye, that a man has been murdered; and then, if none saw the crime done, let circumstances point out the murderer.

“But here, they put the cart before the horse; they find a dead body, with no marks of violence whatever; and labour to prove by circumstantial evidence alone that this mere dead body is a murdered body. This, I am advised, is bad in law, and contrary to general precedents; and the particular precedents for it are not examples, but warnings; since both the prisoners so rashly convicted were proved innocent, after their execution.”

(The judge took a note of this distinction.)

“Then, to go from principles to the facts, I agree and admit that, in a moment of anger, I

was so transported out of myself as to threaten my husband's life before Caroline Ryder. But afterwards, when I saw him face to face, then, that I threatened him with *violence*, that I deny. The fact is I had just learned that he had committed a capital offence: and what I threatened him with was the law. This was proved by Jane Bannister. She says she heard me say the constables should come for him next morning. For what? to murder him?"

*The Judge.* Give me leave, madam. Shall you prove Mr. Gaunt had committed a capital offence?

*Prisoner.* I could, my lord; but I am loth to do it. For, if I did, I should cast him into worse trouble than I am in myself.

*The Judge* (shaking his head gravely). Let me advise you to advance nothing you are not able and willing to prove.

*The Prisoner.* Then, I confine myself to this: it was proved by a witness for the Crown that in

the dining-room I threatened my husband to his face with the law. Now this threat, and not that other extravagant threat, which he never heard you know, was clearly the threat which caused him to abscond that night.

“In the next place, I agree with the learned counsel that I was out of doors at one o’clock that morning. But if he will use me as HIS WITNESS in that matter, then he must not pick and choose and mutilate my testimony. Nay, let him take the whole truth, and not just so much as he can square with the indictment. Either believe me, that I was out of doors praying, or do not believe me that I was out of doors at all.

“Gentlemen, hear the simple truth. You may see in the map, on the south side of Hernshaw Castle, a grove of large fir-trees. ’Tis a reverend place, most fit for prayer and meditation. Here I have prayed a thousand times and more before the fifteenth October. Hence ’tis called ‘the

Dame's haunt,' as I shall prove, that am the dame 'tis called after.

“Let it not seem incredible to you that I should pray out of doors in my grove, on a fine clear starry night. For aught I know, Protestants may pray only by the fireside. But, remember, I am a Catholic. We are not so contracted in our praying. We do not confine it to little comfortable places. Nay, but for seventeen hundred years and more we have prayed out of doors as much as in doors. And this our custom is no fit subject for a shallow sneer. How does the learned serjeant know that, beneath the vault of heaven at night, studded with those angelic eyes, the stars, is an unfit place to bend the knee, and raise the soul in prayer? Has he ever tried it?”

This sudden appeal to a learned and eminent, but by no means devotional, serjeant, so tickled the gentlemen of the bar, that they burst out laughing with singular unanimity

This dashed the prisoner, who had not intended to be funny; and she hesitated, and looked distressed.

*The Judge.* Proceed, madam; these remarks of yours are singular, but quite pertinent, and no fit subject for ridicule. Gentlemen, remember the public looks to you for an example.

*Prisoner.* My Lord, 'twas my fault for making that personal which should be general. But women they are so. 'Tis our foible. I pray the good serjeant to excuse me.

“I say, then, generally, that when the sun retires, then earth fades, but heaven comes out in tenfold glory: and I say the starry firmament at night is a temple not built with hands, and the bare sight of it subdues the passions, chastens the heart, and aids the soul in prayer surprisingly. My lord, as I am a Christian woman, 'tis true that my husband had wronged me cruelly and broken the law. 'Tis true that I raged against him and

he answered me not again. 'Tis true, as that witness said, that my bark is worse than my bite. I cooled, and then felt I had forgotten the wife and the Christian, in my wrath. I repented, and, to be more earnest in my penitence, I did go and pray out o' doors beneath those holy eyes of heaven that seemed to look down with chaste reproach on my ungoverned heat. I left my fire-side, my velvet cushions, and all the little comforts made by human hands, that adorn our earthly dwellings, but distract our eyes from God."

Some applause followed this piece of eloquence, exquisitely uttered. It was checked, and the prisoner resumed, with an entire change of manner.

"Gentlemen, the case against me is like a piece of rotten wood varnished all over. It looks fair to the eye; but will not bear handling.

"As example of what I say, take three charges on which the learned serjeant greatly relied on opening his case :

“1st. That I received Thomas Leicester in my bedroom.

“2nd. That he went hot from me after Mr. Gaunt.

“3rd. That he was seen following Mr. Gaunt with a bloody intent.

“How ugly these three proofs looked at first sight! Well, but when we squeezed the witnesses ever so little, what did these three dwindle down to?

“1st. That I received Thomas Leicester in an ante-room, which leads to a boudoir, and that boudoir leads to my bedroom.

“2nd. That Thomas Leicester went from me to the kitchen, and there, for a good half-hour, drank my ale (as it appears), and made love to his old sweetheart, Caroline Ryder, the false witness for the Crown; and went abroad fresh from *her*, and not from *me*.

“3rd. That he was not (to speak strictly) seen



following Mr. Gaunt, but just walking on the same road, drunk, and staggering, and going at such a rate that, as the Crown's own witness swore, he could hardly in the nature of things overtake Mr. Gaunt, who walked quicker, and straighter too, than he.

“So then, even if a murder has been done, they have failed to connect Thomas Leicester with it, or me with Thomas Leicester. Two broken links in a chain of but three.

“And now I come to the more agreeable part of my defence. I do think there has been no murder at all.

“There is no evidence of a murder.

“A body is found with the flesh eaten by fishes, but the bones, and the head, uninjured. They swear a surgeon, who has examined the body, and certainly he had the presumption to guess it looks like a murdered body. But, being sifted, he was forced to admit that, so far as his experience of

murdered bodies goes, it is not like a murdered body ; for there is no bone broken, nor bruise on the head.

“Where is the body found? In the water. But water by itself is a sufficient cause of death, and a common cause too ; and kills without breaking bones, or bruising the head. O perversity of the wise ! For every one creature murdered in England, ten are accidentally drowned ; and they find a dead man in the water, which is as much as to say they find the slain in the arms of the slayer ; yet they do not once suspect the water, but go about in search of a strange and monstrous crime.

“Mr. Gaunt’s cry for help was heard *here*, if it was heard at all (which I greatly doubt), here by this clump of trees : the body was found here, hard by the bridge ; which is, by measurement, one furlong and sixty paces from that clump of trees, as I shall prove. There is no current in the mere lively enough to move a body, and what

there is runs the wrong way. So this disconnects the cry for help, and the dead body. Another broken link!

“And now I come to my third defence, I say the body is not the body of Griffith Gaunt.

“The body, mutilated it was, had two distinguishing marks: a mole on the brow, and a pair of hobnailed shoes on the feet.

“Now the advisers of the Crown fix their eyes on that mole; but they turn their heads away from the hobnailed shoes. But why? Articles of raiment found on a body are legal evidence of identity. How often, my lord, in cases of murder, hath the Crown relied on such particulars, especially in cases where corruption had obscured the features.

“I shall not imitate this partiality, this obstinate prejudice; I shall not ask you to shut your eyes on the mole, as they do on the shoes, but shall meet the whole truth fairly.

“Mr. Gaunt went from my house, that morning,

with boots on his feet, and with a mole on his brow.

“Thomas Leicester went the same road, with shoes on his feet, and, as I shall prove, with a mole on his brow.

“To be sure the Crown witnesses did not distinctly admit this mole on him; but, you will remember, they dared not deny it on their oaths, and so run their heads into an indictment for perjury.

“But, gentlemen, I shall put seven witnesses into the box, who will all swear that they have known Thomas Leicester for years, and that he had a mole upon his left temple.

“One of these witnesses is—the mother that bore him.

“I shall then call witnesses to prove that, on the fifteenth of October, the bridge over the mere was in bad repair, and a portion of the side rail gone; and that the body was found within a few yards of that defective bridge; and then, as

Thomas Leicester went that way, drunk, and staggering from side to side, you may reasonably infer that he fell into the water in passing the bridge. To show you this is possible, I shall prove the same thing has actually occurred. I shall swear the oldest man in the parish, who will depose to a similar event that happened in his boyhood. He hath said it a thousand times before to-day, and now will swear it. He will tell you that on a certain day, sixty-nine years ago, the parson of Hernshaw, the Rev. Augustus Murthwaite, went to cross this bridge at night, after carousing at Hernshaw Castle with our great-grandfather, my husband's and mine, the then proprietor of Hernshaw; and tumbled into the water; and his body was found, gnawed out of the very form of humanity by the fishes, within a yard or two of the spot where poor Tom Leicester was found, that hath cost us all this trouble. So do the same causes bring round the same events in a cycle of

years. The only difference is that the parson drank his death in our dining-room, and the pedlar in our kitchen.

“No doubt, my lord, you have observed that sometimes a hasty and involuntary inaccuracy gives quite a wrong colour to a thing. I assure you I have suffered by this. It is said that the moment Mr. Atkins proposed to drag my mere, I fainted away. In this account there is an omission. I shall prove that Mr. Atkins used these words—‘And, underneath that water, I undertake to find the remains of Griffith Gaunt.’ Now, gentlemen, you shall understand that at this time, and indeed until the moment when I saw the shoes upon that poor corpse’s feet, I was in great terror for my husband’s life. How could it be otherwise? Caroline Ryder had told me she heard his cry for help. He had disappeared. What was I to think? I feared he had fallen in with robbers. I feared all manner of things.

So when the lawyer said so positively he would find his body, I was overpowered. Ah, gentlemen, wedded love survives many wrongs, many angry words; I love my husband still; and, when the man told me so brutally that he was certainly dead, I fainted away. I confess it. Shall I be hanged for that?

“But now, thank God, I am full of hope that he is alive, and that good hope has given me the courage to make this great effort to save my own life.

“Hitherto I have been able to contradict my accusers positively; but now I come to a mysterious circumstance that I own puzzles me. Most persons accused of murder could, if they chose, make a clean breast, and tell you the whole matter. But this is not my case. I know shoes from boots, and I know Kate Gaunt from a liar and a murderess; but, when all is said, this is still a dark mysterious business, and there are

things in it I can only deal with as you do, gentlemen, by bringing my wits to bear upon them in reasonable conjecture.

“Caroline Ryder swears she heard Mr. Gaunt cry for help. And Mr. Gaunt has certainly disappeared.

“My accusers have somewhat weakened this by trying to palm off the body of Thomas Leicester on you for the body of Mr. Gaunt. But the original mystery remains, and puzzles me. I might fairly appeal to you to disbelieve the witness. She is proved incontinent, and a practised liar, and she forswore herself in this court, and my lord is in two minds about committing her. But a liar does not always lie, and, to be honest, I think she really *believes* she heard Mr. Gaunt cry for help, for she went straight to his bedroom; and that looks as if she really thought she heard his voice. But a liar may be mistaken; do not forget that. Distance affects the voice: and I think the voice she heard was Thomas



Leicester's, and the place it came from higher up the mere.

"This, my notion, will surprise you less when I prove to you that Leicester's voice bore a family likeness to Mr. Gaunt's. I shall call two witnesses who have been out shooting with Mr. Gaunt and Tom Leicester, and have heard Leicester halloo in the wood, and taken it for Mr. Gaunt.

"Must I tell you the whole truth? This Leicester has always passed for an illegitimate son of Mr. Gaunt's father. He resembled my husband in form, stature, and voice: he had the Gaunt mole, and has often spoken of it by that name. My husband forgave him many faults for no other reason,—and I bought his wares and filled his pack for no other reason,—than this; that he was my husband's brother by nature, though not in law. 'HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE.'

"Ah, that is a royal device; yet how often in

this business have the advisers of the Crown forgotten it ?

“ My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I return from these conjectures to the indisputable facts of my defence.

“ Mr. Gaunt may be alive, or may be dead. He was certainly alive on the fifteenth October, and it lies on the Crown to prove him dead, and not on me to prove him alive. But, as for the body that forms the subject of this indictment, it is the body of Thomas Leicester, who was seen on the sixteenth October, at one in the morning, drunk and staggering, and making for Hernshaw bridge, which leads to his mother’s house ; and on all his former visits to Hernshaw Castle he went on to his mother’s, as I shall prove. This time, he never reached her, as I shall prove ; but on his way to her did meet his death by the will of God, and no fault of man or woman, in Hernshaw Mere.

“ Swear Sarah Leicester.”

*The Judge.* I think you say you have several witnesses?

*Prisoner.* More than twenty, my lord.

*The Judge.* We cannot possibly dispose of them this evening. We will hear your evidence to-morrow. Prisoner, this will enable you to consult with your legal advisers, and let me urge upon you to prove, if you can, that Mr. Gaunt has a sufficient motive for hiding and not answering Mr. Atkins' invitation to inherit a large estate. Some such proof is necessary to complete your defence: and I am sorry to see you have made no mention of it in your address, which was otherwise able.

*Prisoner.* My lord, I think I can prove my own innocence without casting a slur upon my husband.

*The Judge.* You *think*? when your life is at stake. Be not so mad as to leave so large a hole in your defence, if you can mend it. Take *advice*.

He said this very solemnly ; then rose and left the court.

Mrs. Gaunt was conveyed back to prison, and there was soon prostrated by the depression that follows an unnatural excitement.

Mr. Houseman found her on the sofa, pale and dejected, and clasping the gaoler's wife convulsively, who applied hartshorn to her nostrils.

He proved but a Job's comforter. Her defence, creditable as it was to a novice, seemed wordy and weak to him, a lawyer : and he was horrified at the admissions she had made. In her place he would have admitted nothing he could not thoroughly explain.

He came to insist on a change of tactics.

When he saw her sad condition, he tried to begin by consoling, and encouraging her. But his own serious misgivings unfitted him for this task, and very soon, notwithstanding the state she was in, he was almost scolding her for being so mad

as to withstand the judge, and set herself against his advice. "There," said he, "my lord kept his word, and became counsel for you. 'Close that gap in your defence,' says he, 'and you will very likely be acquitted.' 'Nay,' says you, 'I prefer to chance it.' What madness! what injustice!"

"Injustice! to whom?"

"To whom? why, to yourself."

"What, may I not be unjust to myself?"

"Certainly not; you have no right to be unjust to anybody. Don't deceive yourself; there is no virtue in this: it is mere miserable weakness. What right have you to peril an innocent life merely to screen the malefactor from just obloquy?"

"Alas!" said Mrs. Gaunt, "'tis more than obloquy. They will kill him; they will brand him with a hot iron."

"Not unless he is indicted: and who will indict him? Sir George Neville must be got to muzzle

the Attorney-General, and the Lancashire jade will not move against him, for you say they are living together."

"Of course they are: and, as you say, why should I screen him? But 'twill not serve, who can combat prejudice? If what I have said does not convince them, an angel's voice would not. Sir, I am a Catholic, and they will hang me. I shall die miserably, having exposed my husband, who loved me once, oh! so dearly. I trifled with his love. I deserve it all."

"You will not die at all, if you will only be good and obedient, and listen to wiser heads. I have subpœnaed Caroline Ryder as your witness, and given her a hint how to escape an indictment for perjury. You will find her supple as a glove."

"Call a rattlesnake for my witness?"

"I have drawn her fangs. You will also call Sir George Neville, to prove he saw Gaunt's

picture at the 'Packhorse,' and heard the other wife's tale. Wiltshire will object to this as evidence, and say why don't you produce Mercy Vint herself. Then you will call me to prove that I sent the subpoena to Mercy Vint. Come now, I cannot eat or sleep till you promise me."

Mrs. Gaunt sighed deeply. "Spare me," said she, "I am worn out. Oh that I could die before the trial begins again!"

Houseman saw the signs of yielding, and persisted. "Come, promise now," said he. "Then you will feel better."

"I will do whatever you bid me," said she. "Only, if they let me off, I will go into a convent. No power shall hinder me."

"You shall go where you like, except to the gallows. Enough, 'tis a promise, and I never knew you to break one. Now I can eat my supper. You are a good obedient child, and I am a happy attorney."

“And I am the most miserable woman in all England.”

“Child,” said the worthy lawyer, “your spirits have given way, because they were strung so high. You need repose. Go to bed now, and sleep twelve hours. Believe me you will wake another woman.”

“Ah! would I could!” cried Mrs. Gaunt, with all the eloquence of despair.

Houseman murmured a few more consoling words, and then left her, after once more exacting a promise that she would receive no more visits, but go to bed directly. She was to send all intruders to him at the “Angel.”

Mrs. Gaunt proceeded to obey his orders, and though it was but eight o’clock, she made preparations for bed, and then went to her nightly devotions.

She was in sore trouble; and earthly trouble turns the heart heavenwards. Yet it was not so with her. The deep languor, that oppressed her,



seemed to have reached her inmost soul. Her beads, falling one by one from her hand, denoted the number of her supplications; but, for once, they were *preces sine mente dictæ*. Her faith was cold, her belief in Divine justice was shaken for a time. She began to doubt and to despond. That bitter hour, which David has sung so well, and Bunyan, from experience, has described in his biography as well as in his novel, sat heavy upon her, as it had on many a true believer before her. So deep was the gloom, so paralysing the languor, that at last she gave up all endeavour to utter words of prayer. She placed her crucifix at the foot of the wall, and laid herself down on the ground and kissed His feet, then drawing back, gazed upon that effigy of the mortal sufferings of our Redeemer.

“*O anima Christiana, respice vulnera patientis, sanguinem morientis, precem redemptionis nostræ.*”

She had lain thus a good half-hour, when a gentle tap came to the door.

“Who is that?” said she.

“Mrs. Menteith,” the gaoler’s wife replied, softly, and asked leave to come in.

Now this Mrs. Menteith had been very kind to her, and stoutly maintained her innocence. Mrs. Gaunt rose, and invited her in.

“Madam,” said Mrs. Menteith, “what I come for, there is a person below who much desires to see you.”

“I beg to be excused,” was the reply. “He must go to my solicitor at the ‘Angel,’ Mr. Houseman.”

Mrs. Menteith retired with that message, but in about five minutes returned to say that the young woman declined to go to Mr. Houseman, and begged hard to see Mrs. Gaunt. “And, Dame,” said she, “if I were you I’d let her come in; ’tis the honestest face, and the tears in her soft eyes,

at your denying her, 'Oh dear, dear,' said she, 'I cannot tell my errand to any but her.' "

"Well, well," said Mrs. Gaunt; "but what is her business?"

"If you ask me, I think her business is your business. Come, Dame, do see the poor thing; she is civil spoken, and she tells me she has come all the way out of Lancashire o' purpose."

Mrs. Gaunt recoiled, as if she had been stung.

"From Lancashire?" said she, faintly.

"Ay, madam," said Mrs. Menteith, "and that is a long road; and a child upon her arm all the way, poor thing."

"Her name?" said Mrs. Gaunt, sternly.

"Oh, she is not ashamed of it. She gave it me directly."

"What, has she the effrontery to take my name?"

Mrs. Menteith stared at her with utter amazement. "*Your* name?" said she. "'Tis a simple

country body, and her name is Vint — Mercy Vint.”

Mrs. Gaunt was very much agitated, and said she felt quite unequal to see a stranger.

“ Well, I’m sure I don’t know what to do,” said Mrs. Menteith. “ She says she will lie at your door all night, but she will see you. ’Tis the face of a friend. She may know something. It seems hard to thrust her and her child out into the street, after their coming all the way from Lancashire.”

Mrs. Gaunt stood silent awhile, and her intelligence had a severe combat with her deep repugnance to be in the same room with Griffith Gaunt’s mistress (so she considered her). But a certain curiosity came to the aid of her good sense ; and after all she was a brave and haughty woman, and her natural courage began to rise. She thought to herself, “ What, dare she come to me all this way, and shall I shrink from *her* ?”

She turned to Mrs. Menteith with a bitter

smile, and she said, very slowly, and clenching her white teeth, "Since you desire it, and she *insists* on it, I will receive Mistress Mercy Vint."

Mrs. Menteith went off, and in about five minutes returned ushering in Merey Vint in a hood and travelling-cloak.

Mrs. Gaunt received her standing, and with a very formal curtsy, to which Mercy made a quiet obeisance, and both women looked one another all over in a moment.

Mrs. Menteith lingered, to know what on earth this was all about; but, as neither spoke a word, and their eyes were fixed on each other, she divined that her absence was necessary, and so retired, slowly, looking very much amazed at both of them.

## CHAPTER XII.

"BE seated, mistress, if you please," said Mrs. Gaunt, with icy civility, "and let me know to what I owe this extraordinary visit."

"I thank you, Dame," said Mercy, "for indeed I am sore fatigued." She sat quietly down. "Why I have come to you? It was to serve you, and to keep my word with George Neville."

"Will you be kind enough to explain?" said Mrs. Gaunt, in a freezing tone, and with a look of her great grey eye to match.

Mercy felt chilled, and was too frank to disguise it. "Alas," said she, softly, "'tis hard to be received so, and me come all the way from

Lancashire, with a heart like lead, to do my duty, God willing."

The tears stood in her eyes, and her mellow voice was sweet and patient.

The gentle remonstrance was not quite without effect. Mrs. Gaunt coloured a little: she said, stiffly, "Excuse me if I seem discourteous: but you and I ought not to be in one room a moment. You do not see this, apparently. But at least I have a right to insist that such an interview shall be very brief, and to the purpose. Oblige me then, by telling me in plain terms why you have come hither."

"Madam, to be your witness at the trial."

"*You* to be *my* witness?"

"Why not? If I can clear you? What, would you rather be condemned for murder, than let me show them you are innocent? Alas, how you hate me!"

"Hate you, child?" said Mrs. Gaunt, colouring

to her temples: "of course I hate you. We are both of us flesh and blood, and hate one another. And one of us is honest enough, and uncivil enough, to say so."

"Speak for yourself, Dame," replied Merey, quietly, "for I hate you not; and I thank God for it. To hate is to be miserable. I'd liever be hated than to hate."

Mrs. Gaunt looked at her. "Your words are goodly and wise," said she; "your face is honest; and your eyes are like a very dove's. But, for all that, you hate me quietly, with all your heart. Human nature is human nature."

"'Tis so. But grace is grace." Mercy was silent a moment, then resumed, "I'll not deny I did hate you for a time, when first I learned the man I had married had a wife, and you were she. We that be women are too unjust to each other, and too indulgent to a man. But I have worn out my hate. I wrestled in prayer, and the God of



Love he did quench my most unreasonable hate. For 'twas the man betrayed me; *you* never wronged me, nor I you. But you are right, madam; 'tis true that nature without grace is black as pitch: the devil he was busy at my ear, and whispered me, 'If the fools in Cumberland hang her, what fault o' thine? Thou wilt be his lawful wife, and thy poor innocent child will be a child of shame no more.' But, by God's grace, I did defy him. And I do defy him." She rose swiftly from her chair, and her dove's eyes gleamed with celestial light. "Get thee behind me, Satan. I tell thee the hangman shall never have her innocent body, nor thou my soul."

The movement was so unexpected, the words and the look so simply noble, that Mrs. Gaunt rose too, and gazed upon her visitor with astonishment and respect—yet still with a dash of doubt.

She thought to herself, "If this creature is not sincere, what a mistress of deceit she must be!"

But Mercy Vint soon returned to her quiet self. She sat down, and said, gravely, and, for the first time, a little coldly, as one who had deserved well, and been received ill—"Mistress Gaunt, you are accused of murdering your husband. 'Tis false, for two days ago I saw him alive."

"What do you say?" cried Mrs. Gaunt, trembling all over.

"Be brave, madam; you have borne great trouble, do not give way under joy. He who has wronged us both—he who wedded you under his own name of Griffith Gaunt, and me under the false name of Thomas Leicester, is no more dead than we are; I saw him two days ago, and spoke to him, and persuaded him to come to Carlisle town and do you justice."

Mrs. Gaunt fell on her knees. "He is alive: He is alive. Thank God! Oh, thank God! He is alive: and God bless the tongue that tells me so. God bless you eternally, Mercy Vint."

The tears of joy streamed down her face, and then Mercy's flowed too. She uttered a little pathetic cry of joy. "Ah," she sobbed, "the bit of comfort I needed so has come to my heavy heart. *She* has blessed me!"

But she said this very softly, and Mrs. Gaunt was in a rapture, and did not hear her.

"Is it a dream? my husband alive? and you the one to come and tell me so? How unjust I have been to you. Forgive me. Why does he not come himself?"

Mercy coloured at this question, and hesitated.

"Well, Dame," said she, "for one thing, he has been on the fuddle for the last two months."

"On the fuddle?"

"Ay; he owns he has never been sober a whole day. And that takes the heart out of a man, as well as the brains. And then he has got it into his head that you will never forgive him; and

that he shall be cast in prison if he shows his face in Cumberland.”

“Why in Cumberland more than in Lancashire?” asked Mrs. Gaunt, biting her lip.

Mercy blushed faintly: she replied with some delicacy, but did not altogether mince the matter.

“He knows I shall never punish him for what he has done to me.”

“Why not? I begin to think he has wronged you almost as much as he has me.”

“Worse, madam; worse. He has robbed me of my good name. You are still his lawful wife, and none can point the finger at you. But, look at me: I was an honest girl; respected by all the parish. What has he made of me? The man that lay a dying in my house, and I saved his life, and so my heart did warm to him, he blasphemed God’s altar, to deceive and betray me; and here I am, a poor forlorn creature, neither maid, wife, nor widow; with a child on

my arms that I do nothing, but cry over; ay, my poor innocent, I left thee down below, because I was ashamed she should see thee; ah me! ah me!" She lifted up her voice, and wept.

Mrs. Gaunt looked at her wistfully; and, like Mercy before her, had a bitter struggle with human nature; a struggle so sharp that, in the midst of it, she burst out crying with strange violence: but, with that burst, her great soul conquered.

She darted out of the room, leaving Mercy astonished at her abrupt departure.

Mercy was patiently drying her eyes, when the door opened, and judge her surprise when she saw Mrs. Gaunt glide into the room with her little boy asleep in her arms, and an expression upon her face more sublime than anything Mercy Vint had ever yet seen on earth. She kissed the babe softly, and, becoming infantine as well as angelic by this contact, sat herself down in a

moment on the floor with him, and held out her hand to Mercy. "There," said she, "come sit beside us; and see how I hate him; no more than you do—sweet innocent."

They looked him all over, discussed his every feature learnedly, kissed his limbs and extremities after the manner of their sex, and comprehending at last that to have been both of them wronged by one man was a bond of sympathy, not hate, the two wives of Griffith Gaunt laid his child across their two laps, and wept over him together.

Mercy Vint took herself to task. "I am but a selfish woman," said she, "to talk, or think of anything but that I came here for." She then proceeded to show Mrs. Gaunt by what means she proposed to secure her acquittal, without getting Griffith Gaunt into trouble.

Mrs. Gaunt listened with keen and grateful

attention, until she came to that part: then she interrupted her eagerly.

“Don’t spare him for me. In your place I’d trounce the villain finely.”

“Ay,” said Mercy, “and then forgive him. But I am different. I shall never forgive him; but I am a poor hand at punishing and revenging. I always was. My name is Mercy, you know. To tell the truth, I *was* to have been called Prudence, after my good aunt; but she said, nay: she had lived to hear Greed, and Selfishness, and a heap of faults, named Prudence: ‘call the child something that means what it does mean, and not after me,’ quoth she. So with me hearing ‘Mercy, Mercy,’ called out after me so many years, I do think the quality hath somehow got under my skin; for I can’t abide to see folk smart, let alone to strike the blow. What, shall I take the place of God, and punish the evil-doers, because ’tis me they wrong? Nay, Dame, I will

never punish him, though he hath wronged me cruelly : all I shall do is to think very ill of him, and shun him, and tear his memory out of my heart. You look at me ; do you think I cannot ? You don't know me. I am very resolute when I see clear. Of course I loved him : loved him dearly. He was like a husband to me, and a kind one. But the moment I knew how basely he had deceived us both, my heart began to turn against the man, and now 'tis ice to him. Heaven knows what I am made of ; for, believe me, I'd liever ten times be beside you than beside him. My heart it lay like a lump of lead till I heard your story, and found I could do you a good turn ; you that he had wronged, as well as me. I read your beautiful eyes ; but nay, fear me not ; I'm not the woman to pine for the fruit that is my neighbour's. All I ask for on earth is a few kind words and looks from you. You are gentle and I am simple ; but we are both one



flesh and blood, and your lovely wet eyes do prove it this moment. Dame Gaunt—Kate—I ne'er was ten miles from home afore, and I am come all this weary way to serve thee. Oh, give me the one thing that can do me good in this world, the one thing I pine for—a little of *your* love."

The words were scarce out of her lips when Mrs. Gaunt caught her impetuously round the neck with both hands, and laid her on that erring but noble heart of hers, and kissed her eagerly.

They kissed one another again and again, and wept over one another.

And now Mrs. Gaunt, who did nothing by halves, could not make enough of Mercy Vint. She ordered supper and ate with her, to make her eat. Mrs. Menteith offered Mercy a bed; but Mrs. Gaunt said she must lie with her, she and her child.

"What," said she, "think you I'll let you out

of my sight? Alas, who knows when you and I shall ever be together again?"

"I know," said Mercy, very gravely. "In this world—never."

They slept in one bed, and held each other by the hand all night, and talked to one another, and in the morning knew each the other's story, and each the other's mind and character, better than their oldest acquaintances knew either the one or the other.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE trial began again: and the court was crowded to suffocation. All eyes were bent on the prisoner. She rose, calm and quiet, and begged leave to say a few words to the court.

Mr. Whitworth objected to that. She had concluded her address yesterday, and called a witness.

*Prisoner.* But I have not examined a witness yet.

*The Judge.* You come somewhat out of time, madam; but, if you will be brief, we will hear you.

*Prisoner.* I thank you, my lord. It was only

to withdraw an error. The cry for help that was heard by the side of Hernshaw Mere, I said, yesterday, that cry was uttered by Thomas Leicester. Well, I find I was mistaken; the cry for help was uttered by my husband, by that Griffith Gaunt I am accused of assassinating.

This extraordinary admission caused a great sensation in court. The judge looked grave and sad; and Serjeant Wiltshire, who came into court just then, whispered his junior, "She has put the rope round her own neck. The jury would never have believed our witness."

*The Prisoner.* I will only add that a person came into the town last night, who knows a great deal more about this mysterious business than I do. I purpose, therefore, to alter the plan of my defence; and, to save your time, my lord, who have dealt so courteously with me, I shall call but a single witness.

Ere the astonishment caused by this sudden

collapse of the defence was in any degree abated, she called "Mercy Vint."

There was the usual stir and struggle; and then the calm self-possessed face and figure of a comely young woman confronted the court. She was sworn; and examined by the prisoner after this fashion.

"Where do you live?"

"At the 'Packhorse,' near Allerton, in Lancashire."

*Prisoner.* Do you know Mr. Griffith Gaunt?

*Mercy.* Madam, I do.

*Prisoner.* Was he at your place in October last?

*Mercy.* Yes, madam, on the thirteenth of October. On that day he left for Cumberland.

*Prisoner.* On foot, or on horseback?

*Mercy.* On horseback.

*Prisoner.* With boots on, or shoes?

*Mercy.* He had a pair of new boots on.

*Prisoner.* Do you know Thomas Leicester?

*Mercy.* A pedlar called at our house on the eleventh of October, and he said his name was Thomas Leicester.

*Prisoner.* How was he shod?

*Mercy.* In hobnailed shoes.

*Prisoner.* Which way went he on leaving you?

*Mercy.* Madam, he went northwards; I know no more for certain.

*Prisoner.* When did you see Mr. Gaunt last?

*Mercy.* Four days ago.

*The Judge.* What is that? you saw him alive four days ago?

*Mercy.* Ay, my lord; the last Wednesday that ever was.

At this the people burst out into a loud agitated murmur, and their heads went to and fro all the time. In vain the crier cried and threatened. The noise rose and surged, and took its course. It went down gradually, as amazement gave way to curiosity; and then there was a remarkable silence;

and then the silvery voice of the prisoner, and the mellow tones of the witness, appeared to penetrate the very walls of the building, each syllable of those two beautiful speakers was heard so distinctly.

*Prisoner.* Be so good as to tell the court what passed on Wednesday last between Griffith Gaunt and you, relative to this charge of murder.

*Mercy.* I let him know one George Neville had come from Cumberland in search of him, and had told me you lay in Carlisle gaol charged with his murder. I did urge him to ride at once to Carlisle, and show himself; but he refused. He made light of the matter. Then I told him, not so; the circumstances looked ugly, and your life was in peril. Then he said, nay, 'twas in no peril, for, if you were to be found guilty, then he would show himself on the instant. Then I told him he was not worthy the name of a man; and if he would not go, I would. "Go you, by all means," said he, "and I'll give you a writing that will clear her.

Jack Houseman will be there, that knows my hand ; and so does the sheriff, and half the grand jury at the least."

*Prisoner.* Have you that writing?

*Mercy.* To be sure I have. Here 'tis.

*Prisoner.* Be pleased to read it.

*The Judge.* Stay a minute. Shall you prove it to be his handwriting?

*Prisoner.* Ay, my lord, by as many as you please.

*The Judge.* Then let that stand over for the present. Let me see it.

It was handed up to him ; and he showed it to the sheriff, who said he thought it was Griffith Gaunt's writing.

The paper was then read out to the jury. It ran as follows :—

"Know all men, that I, Griffith Gaunt, Esq., of Bolton Hall and Hernshaw Castle, in the county of



Cumberland, am alive and well; and the matter, which has so puzzled the good folk in Cumberland, befell as follows:—I left Hernshaw Castle in the dead of night upon the fifteenth of October. Why, is no man's business but mine. I found the stable locked; so I left my horse, and went on foot. I crossed Hernshaw Mere by the bridge, and had got about a hundred yards, as I suppose, on the way, when I heard some one fall with a great splash into the mere, and soon after cry dolefully for help. I, that am no swimmer, ran instantly to the north side to a clump of trees, where a boat used always to be kept. But the boat was not there. Then I cried lustily for help, and, as no one came, I fired my pistol and cried murder! For I had heard men will come sooner to that cry than to any other. But in truth I was almost out of my wits, that a fellow-creature should perish miserably so near me. Whilst I ran wildly to and fro, some came out of the Castle bearing torches.

By this time I was at the bridge ; but saw no signs of the drowning man ; yet the night was clear. Then I knew that his fate was sealed ; and for reasons of my own not choosing to be seen by those who were coming to his aid, I hastened from the place. My happiness being gone, and my conscience smiting me sore, and not knowing whither to turn, I took to drink, and fell into bad ways, and lived like a brute and not a man, for six weeks or more ; so that I never knew of the good fortune that had fallen on me when least I deserved it ; I mean by old Mr. Gaunt of Coggleswade making of me his heir. But one day at Kendal I saw Mercy Vint's advertisement ; and I went to her, and learned that my wife lay in Carlisle gaol for my supposed murder. But I say that she is innocent, and nowise to blame in this matter ; for I deserved every hard word she ever gave me ; and as for killing, she is a spirited woman with her tongue, but hath not the heart to kill a fly. She is what

she always was, the pearl of womankind; a virtuous, innocent, and noble lady. I have lost the treasure of her love, by my fault, not hers; but, at least, I have a right to defend her life and honour. Whoever molests her after this, out of pretended regard for me, is a liar, and a fool, and no friend of mine, but my enemy, and I his—to the death.

“GRIFFITH GAUNT.”

It was a day of surprises. This tribute from the murdered man to his assassin was one of them. People looked in one another's faces open-eyed.

The prisoner looked in the judge's, and acted on what she saw there. “That is my defence,” said she, quietly; and sat down.

If a show of hands had been called at that moment, she would have been acquitted by acclamation.

But Mr. Whitworth was a zealous young barrister, burning for distinction. He stuck to his case, and cross-examined Mercy Vint with severity ; indeed, with asperity.

*Whitworth.* What are you to receive for this evidence ?

*Mercy.* Anan.

*Whitworth.* Oh, you know what I mean. Are you not to be paid for telling us this romance ?

*Mercy.* Nay, sir, I ask nought for telling of the truth.

*Whitworth.* You were in the prisoner's company yesterday.

*Mercy.* Yes, sir, I did visit her in the gaol last night.

*Whitworth.* And there concerted this ingenious defence.

*Mercy.* Well, sir, for that matter, I told her that her man was alive, and I did offer to be her witness.

*Whitworth.* For nought.

*Mercy.* For no money or reward, if 'tis that you mean. Why, 'tis a joy beyond money, to clear an innocent body, and save her life ; and that satisfaction is mine this day.

*Whitworth* (sarcastically). These are very fine sentiments for a person in your condition. Confess that Mrs. Gaunt primed you with all that.

*Mercy.* Nay, sir, I left home in that mind ; else I had not come at all. Bethink you ; 'tis a long journey for one in my way of life ; and this dear child on my arm all the way.

Mrs. Gaunt sat boiling with indignation. But Mercy's good temper and meekness parried the attack that time. Mr. Whitworth changed his line.

*Whitworth.* You ask the jury to believe that Griffith Gaunt, Esquire, a gentleman, and a man of spirit and honour, is alive, yet skulks and sends you hither, when by showing his face in this court

he could clear his wife without a single word spoken ?

*Mercy.* Yes, sir, I do hope to be believed ; for I speak the naked truth. But, with due respect to you, Mr. Gaunt did not send me hither against my will. I could not bide in Lancashire and let an innocent woman be murdered in Cumberland.

*Whitworth.* Murdered, quotha. That is a good jest. I'd have you to know we punish murders here, not do them.

*Mercy.* I am glad to hear that, sir, on the lady's account.

*Whitworth.* Come, come. You pretend you discovered this Griffith Gaunt alive, by means of an advertisement. If so, produce the advertisement.

Mercy Vint coloured, and cast a swift uneasy glance at Mrs. Gaunt.

Rapid as it was, the keen eye of the counsel caught it.

“Nay, do not look to the culprit for orders,”

said he. "Produce it, or confess the truth. Come, you never advertised for him."

"Sir, I did advertise for him."

"Then produce the advertisement."

"Sir, I will not," said Mercy, calmly.

"Then I shall move the court to commit you."

"For what offence, if you please?"

"For perjury, and contempt of court."

"I am guiltless of either, God knows. But I will not show the advertisement."

*The Judge.* This is very extraordinary. Perhaps you have it not about you."

*Mercy.* My lord, the truth is I have it in my bosom. But, if I show it, it will not make this matter one whit clearer, and 'twill open the wounds of two poor women. 'Tis not for myself. But, oh my lord, look at her; hath she not gone through grief enow?"

The appeal was made with a quiet touching earnestness, that affected every hearer. But the

judge had a duty to perform. "Witness," said he, "you mean well; but indeed you do the prisoner an injury by withholding this paper. Be good enough to produce it at once."

*The Prisoner* (with a deep sigh). Obey my lord.

*Merey* (with a deep sigh). There, sir, may the Lord forgive you the useless mischief you are doing.

*Whitworth*. I am doing my duty, young woman. And yours is to tell the whole truth, and not a part only.

*Merey* (acquiescing). That is true, sir.

*Whitworth*. Why, what is this? 'Tis not Mr. Gaunt you advertise for in these papers. 'Tis Thomas Leicester.

*The Judge*. What is that? I don't understand.

*Whitworth*. Nor I neither.

*The Judge*. Let me see the papers. 'Tis Thomas Leicester sure enough.

*Whitworth*. And you mean to swear that Griffith



Gaunt answered an advertisement inviting Thomas Leicester?

*Mercy.* I do. Thomas Leicester was the name he went by in our part.

*Whitworth.* What? what? You are jesting.

*Mercy.* Is this a place or a time for jesting? I say he called himself Thomas Leicester.

Here the business was interrupted again [by a multitudinous murmur of excited voices. Everybody was whispering astonishment to his neighbour. And the whisper of a great crowd has the effect of a loud murmur.

*Whitworth.* Oh, he called himself Thomas Leicester, did he? Then what makes you say he is Griffith Gaunt?

*Mercy.* Well, sir, the pedlar, whose real name was Thomas Leicester, came to our house one day, and saw his picture, and knew it; and said something to a neighbour that raised my suspicions. When *he* came home, I took this shirt out of a

drawer; 'twas the shirt he wore when he first came to us. 'Tis marked "G. G." (The shirt was examined). Said I, "For God's sake speak the truth: what does G. G. stand for?" Then he told me his real name was Griffith Gaunt, and he had a wife in Cumberland. "Go back to her," said I, "and ask her to forgive you." Then he rode north, and I never saw him again till last Wednesday.

*Whitworth* (satirically). You seem to have been mighty intimate with this Thomas Leicester, whom you now call Griffith Gaunt. May I ask what was, or is, the nature of your connection with him?

Mercy was silent.

*Whitworth*. I must press for a reply, that we may know what value to attach to your most extraordinary evidence. Were you his wife—or his mistress?

*Mercy*. Indeed I hardly know; but not his mistress, or I should not be here.

*Whitworth.* You don't know whether you were married to the man or not?

*Mercy.* I do not say so. But——

She hesitated, and cast a piteous look at Mrs. Gaunt, who sat boiling with indignation.

At this look, the prisoner, who had long contained herself with difficulty, rose, with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes, in defence of her witness, and flung her prudence to the wind.

“Fie, sir,” she cried. “The woman you insult is as pure as your own mother, or mine. She deserves the pity, the respect, the veneration of all good men. Know, my lord, that my miserable husband deceived and married her under the false name he had taken; she has the marriage certificate in her bosom. Pray make her show it whether she will or not. My lord, this Mercy Vint is more an angel than a woman. I am her rival after a manner; yet out of the goodness and greatness of her noble heart, she came all that

way to save me from an unjust death. And is such a woman to be insulted? I blush for the hired advocate who cannot see his superior in an incorruptible witness, a creature all truth, piety, purity, unselfishness, and goodness. Yes, sir, you began by insinuating that she was as venal as yourself; for you are one that can be bought by the first comer; and now you would cast a slur on her chastity, For shame! for shame! This is one of those rare women that adorn our whole sex, and embellish human nature: and, so long as you have the privilege of exchanging words with her, I shall stand here on the watch, to see that you treat her with due respect: ay, sir, with reverence; for I have measured you both, and she is as much your superior as she is mine."

This amazing burst was delivered with such prodigious fire and rapidity, that nobody was self-possessed enough to stop it in time. It was like a furious gust of words sweeping over the court.

Mr. Whitworth, pale with anger, merely said, "Madam, the good taste of these remarks I leave the court to decide upon. But you cannot be allowed to give evidence in your own defence."

"No, but in hers I will," said Mrs. Gaunt; "no power shall hinder me."

*The Judge* (coldly). Had you not better go on cross-examining the witness?

*Whitworth*. Let me see your marriage certificate, if you have one?

It was handed to him.

"Well, now how do you know that this Thomas Leicester was Griffith Gaunt?"

*The Judge*. Why, she has told you he confessed it to her.

*Mercy*. Yes, my lord; and, besides, he wrote me two letters signed Thomas Leicester. Here they are, and I desire they may be compared with the paper he wrote last Wednesday, and signed Griffith Gaunt. And more than that, whilst we

lived together as man and wife, one Hamilton, a travelling painter, took our portraits, his and mine. I have brought his with me. Let his friends and neighbours look on this portrait, and say whose likeness it is. What I say and swear is, that on Wednesday last I saw and spoke with that Thomas Leicester, or Griffith Gaunt, whose likeness I now show you.

With that she lifted the portrait up, and showed it to all the court.

Instantly there was a roar of recognition.

It was one of those hard daubs that are nevertheless so monstrously like the originals.

*The Judge* (to Mr. Whitworth). Young gentleman, we are all greatly obliged to you. You have made the prisoner's case. There was but one weak point in it; I mean the prolonged absence of Griffith Gaunt. You have now accounted for that. You have forced a very truthful witness to depose that this Gaunt is himself a criminal, and is hiding

from fear of the law. The case for the Crown is a mere tissue of conjectures, on which no jury could safely convict, even if there was no defence at all. Under other circumstances I might decline to receive evidence at second hand that Griffith Gaunt is alive ; but here such evidence is sufficient, for it lies on the Crown to prove the man dead ; but you have only proved that he was alive on the fifteenth of October, and that, since then, *somebody* is dead with shoes on. This somebody appears on the balance of proof to be Thomas Leicester, the pedlar ; and he has never been heard of since, and Griffith Gaunt has. Then I say you cannot carry the case farther. You have not a leg to stand on. What say you, brother Wiltshire ?

*Wiltshire.* My lord, I think there is no case against the prisoner, and am thankful to your lordship for relieving me of a very unpleasant task.

The question of guilty or not guilty was then

put as a matter of form to the jury, who instantly brought the prisoner in not guilty.

*The Judge.* Catherine Gaunt, you leave this court without a stain, and with our sincere respect and sympathy. I much regret the fear and pain you have been put to: you have been terribly punished for a hasty word. Profit now by this bitter lesson; and may heaven enable you to add a well-governed spirit to your many virtues and graces.

He half rose from his seat, and bowed courteously to her. She curtsied reverently, and retired.

He then said a few words to Mercy Vint.

“Young woman, I have no words to praise you as you deserve. You have shown us the beauty of the female character, and, let me add, the beauty of the Christian religion. You have come a long way to clear the innocent. I hope you will not stop there; but also punish the guilty person, on whom we have wasted so much pity.”



“Me, my lord,” said Mercy, “I would not harm a hair of his head for as many guineas as there be hairs in mine.”

“Child,” said my lord, “thou art too good for this world : but go thy ways ; and God bless thee.”

Thus abruptly ended a trial that, at first, had looked so formidable for the accused.

The Judge now retired for some refreshment, and while he was gone, Sir George Neville dashed up to the Town Hall, four in hand, and rushed in by the magistrate’s door, with a pedlar’s pack, which he had discovered in the mere, a few yards from the spot where the mutilated body was found.

He learned the prisoner was already acquitted. He left the pack with the sheriff, and begged him to show it to the judge ; and went in search of Mrs. Gaunt.

He found her in the gaoler’s house. She and Mercy Vint were seated hand in hand. He started at first sight of the latter. There was a

universal shaking of hands, and glistening of eyes. And, when this was over, Mrs. Gaunt turned to him, and said, piteously, "She will go back to Lancashire to-morrow; nothing I can say will turn her."

"No, Dame," said Mercy, quietly, "Cumberland is no place for me. My work is done here. Our paths in this world do lie apart. George Neville, persuade her to go home at once, and not trouble about me."

"Indeed, madam," said Sir George, "she speaks wisely: she always does. My carriage is at the door, and the people waiting by thousands in the street to welcome your deliverance."

Mrs. Gaunt drew herself up with fiery and bitter disdain.

"Are they so," said she, grimly. "Then I'll baulk them. I'll steal away in the dead of night. No, miserable populace, that howls and hisses with the strong against the weak, you shall have

no part in my triumph ; 'tis sacred to my friends. You honoured me with your hootings ; you shall not disgrace me with your acclamations. Here I stay till Mercy Vint, my guardian angel, leaves me for ever."

She then requested Sir George to order his horses back to the inn, and the coachman was to hold himself in readiness to start when the whole town should be asleep.

Meantime a courier was despatched to Hernshaw Castle, to prepare for Mrs. Gaunt's reception.

Mrs. Menteith made a bed up for Mercy Vint, and, at midnight, when the coast was clear, came the parting.

It was a sad one.

Even Mercy, who had great self-command, could not then restrain her tears.

To apply the sweet and touching words of Scripture, "They sorrowed most of all for this, that they should see each other's face no more."

Sir George accompanied Mrs. Gaunt to Hershaw.

She drew back into her corner of the carriage, and was very silent and distraite.

After one or two attempts at conversation, he judged it wisest and even most polite to respect her mood.

At last she burst out, "I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it!"

"Why, what is amiss?" inquired Sir George.

"What is amiss? Why, 'tis all amiss. 'Tis so heartless, so ungrateful, to let that poor angel go home to Lancashire all alone, now she has served my turn. Sir George, do not think I undervalue your company, but if you *would* but take her home instead of taking me! Poor thing, she is brave; but, when the excitement of her good action is over, and she goes back the weary road all alone, what desolation it will be. My heart bleeds for her. I know I am an unconscionable woman, to

ask such a thing; but then you are a true chevalier; you always were; and you saw her merit directly; oh, do pray leave me to slip unnoticed into Hernshaw Castle, and do you accompany my benefactress to her humble home. Will you, dear Sir George? 'Twould be such a load off my heart."

To this appeal, uttered with trembling lip and moist eyes, Sir George replied in character. He declined to desert Mrs. Gaunt until he had seen her safe home; but that done, he would ride back to Carlisle, and escort Mercy home.

Mrs. Gaunt sighed, and said she was abusing his friendship, and should kill him with fatigue, and he was a good creature. "If anything could make me easy, this would," said she: "you know how to talk to a woman, and comfort her. I wish I was a man: I'd cure her of Griffith before we reached the 'Packhorse.' And, now I think of it, you are a very happy man

to travel eighty miles with an angel, a dove-eyed angel."

"I am a happy man to have an opportunity of complying with your desires, madam," was the demure reply. "'Tis not often you do me the honour to lay your orders on me."

After this, nothing of any moment passed until they reached Hernshaw Castle; and then, as they drove up to the door, and saw the hall blazing with lights, Mrs. Gaunt laid her hand softly on Sir George, and whispered, "You were right. I thank you for not leaving me."

The servants were all in the hall, to receive their mistress; and amongst them were those who had given honest but unfavourable testimony at the trial, being called by the Crown. These had consulted together, and, after many pros and cons, had decided that they had better not follow their natural impulse, and hide from her face, since that might be a fresh offence. Accordingly, these

witnesses, dressed in their best, stood with the others in the hall, and made their obeisances, quaking inwardly.

Mrs. Gaunt entered the hall leaning on Sir George's arm. She scarcely bestowed a look upon the late witnesses for the Crown, but made them one sweeping curtsy in return, and passed on; only Sir George felt her taper fingers just nip his arm.

She made him partake of some supper, and then this chevalier des dames rode home, snatched a few hours' sleep, put on the yeoman's suit in which he had first visited the "Packhorse," and arriving at Carlisle, engaged the whole inside of the coach; for his orders were to console, and he did not see his way clear to do that with two or three strangers listening to every word.

## CHAPTER XIV.

A GREAT change was observable in Mrs. Gaunt after this fiery and chastening ordeal. In a short time she had been taught many lessons. She had learned that the law will not allow even a woman to say anything and everything with impunity. She had been in a court of justice, and seen how gravely, soberly, and fairly, an accusation is sifted there; and, if false, annihilated; which, elsewhere, it never is. Member of a sex that could never have invented a court of justice, she had found something to revere and bless in that other sex, to which her erring husband belonged. Finally, she had encountered, in Mercy Vint, a woman, whom she recognised at once as her moral superior. The contact of that pure and well-



governed spirit told wonderfully upon her ; she began to watch her tongue, and to bridle her high spirit. She became slower to give offence, and slower to take it. She took herself to task, and made some little excuses even for Griffith. She was resolved to retire from the world altogether ; but, meantime, she bowed her head to the lessons of adversity. Her features, always lovely, but somewhat too haughty, were now softened and embellished beyond description, by a mingled expression of grief, humility, and resignation.

She never mentioned her husband ; but it is not to be supposed she never thought of him. She waited the course of events in dignified and patient silence.

As for Griffith Gaunt, he was in the hands of two lawyers, Atkins and Houseman. He waited on the first, and made a friend of him. “I am at your service,” said he ; “but not if I am to be indicted for bigamy, and burned in the hand.”

"These fears are idle," said Atkins. "Mercy Vint declared in open court she will not proceed against you."

"Ay, but there's my wife."

"She will keep quiet; I have Houseman's word for it."

"Ay, but there's the Attorney-General."

"Oh, he will not move, unless he is driven. We must use a little influence. Mr. Houseman is of my mind, and he has the ear of the county."

To be brief, it was represented in high quarters that to indict Mr. Gaunt would only open Mrs. Gaunt's wounds afresh, and do no good; and so Houseman found means to muzzle the Attorney-General.

Just three weeks after the trial, Griffith Gaunt, Esq., reappeared publicly. The place of his reappearance was Coggleswade. He came and set about finishing his new mansion with feverish rapidity. He engaged an army of carpenters and

painters, and spent thousands of pounds on the decorating and furnishing of the mansion, and laying out the grounds.

This was duly reported to Mrs. Gaunt, who said—not a word.

But at last one day came a letter to Mrs. Gaunt, in Griffith's well-known handwriting.

With all her acquired self-possession, her hand trembled as she broke open the seal.

It contained but these words :—

“MADAM,—I do not ask you to forgive me ; for, if you had done what I have, I could never forgive you. But, for the sake of Rose, and to stop their tongues, I do hope you will do me the honour to live under this my roof. I dare not face Hernshaw Castle. Your own apartments here are now ready for you. The place is large. Upon my honour I will not trouble you ; but show myself always, as now,

“Your penitent and very humble servant,

“GRIFFITH GAUNT.”

The messenger was to wait for her reply.

This letter disturbed Mrs. Gaunt's sorrowful tranquillity at once. She was much agitated, and so undecided, that she sent the messenger away, and told him to call next day.

Then she sent off to Father Francis to beg his advice.

But her courier returned, late at night, to say Father Francis was away from home.

Then she took Rose, and said to her, "My darling, papa wants us to go to his new house, and leave dear old Hernshaw; I know not what to say about that. What do *you* say?"

"Tell him to come to us," said Rose, dictatorially. "Only," (lowering her little voice very suddenly), "if he is naughty and won't, why then we had better go to him. For he amuses me."

"As you please," said Mrs. Gaunt; and sent her husband this reply:—

“SIR,—Rose and I are agreed to defer to your judgment and obey your wishes. Be pleased to let me know what day you will require us; and I must trouble you to send a carriage.

“I am, sir,

“Your faithful Wife, and humble Servant,

“CATHERINE GAUNT.”

At the appointed day, a carriage and four came wheeling up to the door. The vehicle was gorgeously emblazoned, and the servants in rich liveries; all which finery glittering in the sun, and the glossy coats of the horses, did mightily please Mistress Rose. She stood on the stone steps, and clapped her hands with delight. Her mother just sighed, and said, “Ay, ’tis in pomp and show we must seek our happiness now.”

She leaned back in the carriage, and closed her eyes, yet not so close but now and then a tear would steal out, as she thought of the past.

They drove up under an avenue to a noble mansion, and landed at the foot of some marble steps, low and narrow, but of vast breadth.

As they mounted these, a hall door, through which the carriage could have passed, was flung open, and discovered the servants all drawn up to do honour to their mistress.

She entered the hall, leading Rose by the hand, the servants bowed and curtsied down to the ground.

She received this homage with dignified courtesy, and her eye stole round to see if the master of the house was coming to receive her.

The library door was opened hastily, and out came to meet her—Father Francis.

“Welcome, madam, a thousand times welcome to your new home,” said he, in a stentorian voice, with a double infusion of geniality. “I claim the honour of showing you your part of the house,

though 'tis all yours for that matter." And he led the way.

Now this cheerful stentorian voice was just a little shaky for once, and his eyes were moist.

Mrs. Gaunt noticed, but said nothing before the people. She smiled graciously, and accompanied him.

He took her to her apartments. They consisted of a *salle-à-manger*, three delightful bedrooms, a boudoir, and a magnificent drawing-room, fifty feet long, with two fire-places, and a bay-window thirty feet wide, filled with the choicest flowers.

An exclamation of delight escaped Mrs. Gaunt. Then she said, "One would think I was a queen." Then she sighed, "Ah," said she, "'tis a fine thing to be rich." Then, despondently, "Tell him I think it very beautiful."

"Nay, madam, I hope you will tell him so yourself."

Mrs. Gaunt made no reply to that ; she added :  
“And it was kind of him to have you here the first day : I do not feel so lonely as I should without you.”

She took Griffith at his word, and lived with Rose in her own apartments.

For some time Griffith used to slip away whenever he saw her coming.

One day she caught him at it, and beckoned him.

He came to her.

“You need not run away from me,” said she :  
“I did not come into your house to quarrel with you. Let us be *friends*.” And she gave him her hand sweetly enough, but oh so coldly.

“I hope for nothing more,” said Griffith. “If you ever have a wish, give me the pleasure of gratifying it—that is all.”

“I wish to retire to a convent,” said she, quietly.



“And desert your daughter?”

“I would leave her behind, to remind you of days gone by.”

By degrees they saw a little more of one another; they even dined together, now and then. But it brought them no nearer. There was no anger, with its loving reaction. They were friendly enough, but an icy barrier stood between them.

One person set himself quietly to sap this barrier. Father Francis was often at the Castle, and played the peace-maker very adroitly.

The line he took might be called the innocent Jesuitical. He saw that it would be useless to exhort these two persons to ignore the terrible things that happened, and to make it up as if it was only a squabble. What he did was to repeat to the husband every gracious word the wife let fall, and *vice versâ*, and to suppress all either said that might tend to estrange them.

In short, he acted the part of Mr. Harmony in the play, and acted it to perfection.

*Gutta cavat lapidem.*

Though no perceptible effect followed his efforts, yet there is no doubt that he got rid of some of the bitterness. But the coldness remained.

One day he was sent for all in a hurry by Griffith.

He found him looking gloomy and agitated.

The cause came out directly. Griffith had observed, at last, what all the females in the house had seen two months ago, that Mrs. Gaunt was in the family-way.

He now communicated this to Father Francis, with a voice of agony, and looks to match.

“All the better, my son,” said the genial priest; “’twill be another tie between you. I hope it will be a fine boy to inherit your estates.” Then, observing a certain hideous expression distorting Griffith’s face, he fixed his eyes full on him, and

said, sternly, "Are you not cured yet of that madness of yours?"

"No, no, no," said Griffith, deprecatingly ;  
"but why did she not tell me?"

"You had better ask her."

"Not I. She will remind me I am nothing to her now. And, though 'tis so, yet I would not hear it from her lips."

In spite of this wise resolution, the torture he was in drove him to remonstrate with her on her silence.

She blushed high, and excused herself as follows :—

"I should have told you as soon as I knew it myself. But you were not with me. I was all by myself—in Carlisle gaol."

This reply, uttered with hypocritical meekness, went through Griffith like a knife. He turned white, and gasped for breath, but said nothing. He left her, with a deep groan, and never ventured to mention the matter again.

All he did in that direction was to redouble his attentions and solicitude for her health.

The relation between these two was now more anomalous than ever.

Even Father Francis, who had seen strange things in families, used to watch Mrs. Gaunt rise from table and walk heavily to the door, and her husband dart to it and open it obsequiously, and receive only a very formal reverence in return—and wonder how all this was to end.

However, under this icy surface, a change was gradually going on; and one afternoon, to his great surprise, Mrs. Gaunt's maid came to ask Griffith if he would come to Mrs. Gaunt's apartment.

He found her seated in her bay window, among her flowers. She seemed another woman all of a sudden, and smiled on him her exquisite smile of days gone by.

“Come, sit beside me,” said she, “in this beautiful window that you have given me.”

“Sit beside you, Kate,” said Griffith; “nay, let me kneel at your knees; that is my place.”

“As you will,” said she, softly; and continued, in the same tone, “Now listen to me; you and I are two fools; we have been very happy together in days gone by; and we should both of us like to try again; but we neither of us know how to begin. You are afraid to tell me you love me and I am ashamed to own to you or anybody else that I love you, in spite of it all—I do, though.”

“You love me! a wretch like me, Kate? ’Tis impossible. I cannot be so happy!”

“Child,” said Mrs. Gaunt, “love is not reason; love is not common sense. ’Tis a passion; like your jealousy, poor fool. I love you, as a mother loves her child, all the more for all you have made me suffer. I might not say as much if I thought we should be long together. But something tells me I shall die this time: I never felt so before. I want you to bury me at Hernshaw.

After all, I spent more happy years there than most wives ever know. I see you are very sorry for what you have done. How could I die and leave thee in doubt of my forgiveness, and my love? Kiss me, poor jealous fool; for I do forgive thee, and love thee with all my sorrowful heart." And even with the words she bowed herself and sank quietly into his arms, and he kissed her and cried bitterly over her: bitterly. But she was comparatively calm. For she said to herself, "the end is at hand."

Griffith, instead of pooh-poohing his wife's forebodings, set himself to baffle them.

He used his wealth freely; and, besides the county doctor, had two very eminent practitioners from London, one of whom was a grey-headed man, the other singularly young for the fame he had obtained. But then he was a genuine enthusiast in his art.

## CHAPTER XV.

GRIFFITH, white as a ghost, and unable to shake off the forebodings Catherine had communicated to him, walked incessantly up and down the room ; and at his earnest request, one or other of the four doctors in attendance was constantly coming to him with information.

The case proceeded favourably, and to Griffith's surprise and joy, a healthy boy was born about two o'clock in the morning. The mother was reported rather feverish, but nothing to cause alarm.

Griffith threw himself on two chairs and fell fast asleep.

Towards morning he found himself shaken, and there was Ashley, the young doctor, standing beside him with a very grave face. Griffith started up, and cried, "What is wrong, in God's name?"

"I am sorry to say there has been a sudden hæmorrhage, and the patient is much exhausted."

"She is dying, she is dying!" cried Griffith, in anguish.

"Not dying. But she will infallibly sink unless some unusual circumstance occur to sustain vitality."

Griffith laid hold of him. "Oh, sir, take my whole fortune, but save her! save her! save her!"

"Mr. Gaunt," said the young doctor, "be calm, or you will make matters worse. There is one chance to save her; but my professional brethren are prejudiced against it. However, they have consented, at my earnest request, to refer my proposal to you. She is sinking for want of blood: if you consent to my opening a vein and transfusing



healthy blood from a living subject into hers, I will undertake the operation. You had better come and see her ; you will be more able to judge."

"Let me lean on you," said Griffith. And the strong wrestler went tottering up the stairs. There they showed him poor Kate, white as the bed-clothes, breathing hard, and with a pulse that hardly moved.

Griffith looked at her horror-struck.

"Death has got hold of my darling," he screamed. "Snatch her away ! for God's sake, snatch her from him !"

The young doctor whipped off his coat, and bared his arm.

"There," he cried, "Mr. Gaunt consents. Now, Corrie, be quick with the lancet, and hold this tube as I tell you ; warm it first in that water."

Here came an interruption. Griffith Gaunt gripped the young doctor's arm, and with an agonized and ugly expression of countenance cried out,

“What? *your* blood! What right have you to lose blood for her?”

“The right of a man who loves his art better than his blood,” cried Ashley, with enthusiasm.

Griffith tore off his coat and waistcoat, and bared his arm to the elbow. “Take every drop I have. No man’s blood shall enter her veins but mine.” And the creature seemed to swell to double his size, as with flushed cheek and sparkling eyes he held out a bare arm corded like a blacksmith’s, and white as a duchess’s.

The young doctor eyed the magnificent limb a moment with rapture: then fixed his apparatus and performed an operation which then, as now, was impossible in theory; only he did it. He sent some of Griffith Gaunt’s bright red blood smoking hot into Kate Gaunt’s veins.

This done, he watched his patient closely, and administered stimulants from time to time.

She hung between life and death for hours. But

at noon next day she spoke, and seeing Griffith sitting beside her, pale with anxiety and loss of blood, she said, "My dear, do not thou fret. I died last night. I knew I should. But they gave me another life; and now I shall live to a hundred."

They showed her the little boy; and, at sight of him, the whole woman made up her mind to live.

And live she did. And, what is very remarkable, her convalescence was more rapid than on any former occasion.

It was from a talkative nurse she first learned that Griffith had given his blood for her. She said nothing at the time, but lay with an angelic, happy smile, thinking of it.

The first time she saw him after that, she laid her hand on his arm, and looking Heaven itself into his eyes, she said, "My life is very dear to me now. 'Tis a present from thee."

She wanted a good excuse for loving him as frankly as before, and now he had given her one. She used to throw it in his teeth in the prettiest way. Whenever she confessed a fault, she was sure to turn sily round and say, "but what could one expect of me? I have his blood in my veins."

But once she told Father Francis, quite seriously, that she had never been quite the same woman since she lived by Griffith's blood; she was turned jealous; and moreover it had given him a fascinating power over her; and she could tell blindfold when he was in the room. Which last fact indeed she once proved by actual experiment. But all this I leave to such as study the occult sciences in this profound age of ours.

Starting with this advantage, Time, the great curer, gradually healed a wound that looked incurable.

Mrs. Gaunt became a better wife than she had

ever been before. She studied her husband, and found he was not hard to please. She made his home bright and genial; and so he never went abroad for the sunshine he could have at home.

And he studied her; he added a chapel to the house, and easily persuaded Francis to become the chaplain. Thus they had a peacemaker, and a friend, in the house, and a man severe in morals, but candid in religion, and an inexhaustible companion to them and their children.

And so, after that terrible storm, this pair pursued the even tenour of a peaceful united life, till the olive branches rising around them, and the happy years gliding on, almost obliterated that one dark passage, and made it seem a mere fantastical, incredible, dream.

Mercy Vint and her child went home in the coach. It was empty at starting, and, as

Mrs. Gaunt had foretold, a great sense of desolation fell upon her.

She leaned back, and the patient tears coursed steadily down her comely cheeks.

At the first stage a passenger got down from the outside, and entered the coach.

“What, George Neville!” said Mercy.

“The same,” said he.

She expressed her surprise that he should be going her way.

“’Tis strange,” said he; “but to me most agreeable.”

“And to me too, for that matter,” said she.

Sir George observed her eyes were red, and, to divert her mind and keep up her spirits, launched into a flow of small talk.

In the midst of it, Mercy leaned back in the coach, and began to cry bitterly. So much for that mode of consolation.

Upon this he faced the situation, and begged

her not to grieve. He praised the good action she had done, and told her how everybody admired her for it, especially himself.

At that she gave him her hand in silence, and turned away her pretty head. He carried her hand respectfully to his lips; and his manly heart began to yearn over this suffering virtue; so grave, so dignified, so meek. He was no longer a young man; he began to talk to her like a friend. This tone, and the soft sympathetic voice in which a gentleman speaks to a woman in trouble, unlocked her heart, and for the first time in her life she was led to talk about herself.

She opened her heart to him. She told him she was not the woman to pine for any man. Her youth, her health, and love of occupation would carry her through. What she mourned was the loss of esteem, and the blot upon her child. At that she drew the baby with inexpressible tenderness, and yet with a half defiant air, closer to her bosom.

Sir George assured her she would lose the esteem of none but fools. "As for me," said he, "I always respected you, but now I revere you. You are a martyr, and an angel."

"George," said Mercy, gravely, "be you my friend, not my enemy."

"Why, madam," said he, "sure you can't think me such a wretch."

"I mean, our flatterers are our enemies."

Sir George took the hint, given, as it was, very gravely and decidedly; and henceforth showed her his respect by his acts; he paid her as much attention as if she had been a princess. He handed her out, and handed her in; and coaxed her to eat here, and to drink there; and at the inn where the passengers slept for the night, he showed his long purse, and secured her superior comforts. Console her he could not; but he broke the sense of utter desolation and loneliness with which she started from Carlisle. She told



him so in the inn, and descanted on the goodness of God, who had sent her a friend in that bitter hour.

“You have been very kind to me, George,” said she. “Now Heaven bless you for it, and give you many happy days, and well spent.”

This, from one who never said a word she did not mean, sank deep into Sir George’s heart, and he went to sleep thinking of her, and asking himself, was there nothing he could do for her.

Next morning Sir George handed Mercy and her babe into the coach ; and the villain tried an experiment to see what value she set on him. He did not get in, so Mercy thought she had seen the last of him.

“Farewell, good, kind George,” said she ; “alas, there’s nought but meeting and parting in this weary world.”

The tears stood in her sweet eyes, and she

thanked him, not with words only, but with the soft pressure of her womanly hand.

He slipped up behind the coach, and was ashamed of himself, and his heart warmed to her more and more.

As soon as the coach stopped, my lord opened the door for Mercy to alight. Her eyes were very red, he saw that. She started, and beamed with surprise and pleasure.

“Why, I thought I had lost you for good,” said she. “Whither are you going? to Lancaster?”

“Not quite so far. I am going to the ‘Pack-horse.’”

Mercy opened her eyes, and blushed high. Sir George saw, and, to divert her suspicions, told her merrily to beware of making objections. “I am only a sort of servant in the matter. ’Twas Mrs. Gaunt ordered me.”

“I might have guessed it,” said Mercy. “Bless her ; she knew I should be lonely.”

“She was not easy till she had got rid of me, I assure you,” said Sir George. “So let us make the best on’t, for she is a lady that likes to have her own way.”

“She is a noble creature. George, I shall never regret anything I have done for *her*. And she will not be ungrateful. Oh, the sting of ingratitude : I have felt that. Have you ?”

“No,” said Sir George ; “I have escaped that, by never doing any good actions.”

“I doubt you are telling me a lie,” said Mercy Vint.

She now looked upon Sir George as Mrs. Gaunt’s representative, and prattled freely to him. Only now and then her trouble came over her, and then she took a quiet cry without ceremony.

As for Sir George, he sat and studied, and wondered at her.

Never in his life had he met such a woman as this, who was as candid with him as if he had

been a woman. She seemed to have a window in her bosom, through which he looked, and saw the pure and lovely soul within.

In the afternoon they reached a little town, whence a cart conveyed them to the "Pack-horse."

Here Mercy Vint disappeared, and busied herself with Sir George's comforts.

He sat by himself in the parlour, and missed his gentle companion.

In the morning Mercy thought of course he would go.

But instead of that, he stayed, and followed her about, and began to court her downright.

But the warmer he got, the cooler she. And at last she said, mighty drily, "This is a very dull place for the likes of you."

"'Tis the sweetest place in England," said he; "at least to me; for it contains—the woman I love."

Mercy drew back, and coloured rosy red. "I hope not," said she.

"I loved you the first day I saw you, and heard your voice. And now I love you ten times more. Let me dry thy tears for ever, sweet Mercy. Be my wife."

"You are mad," said Mercy. "What, would you wed a woman in my condition? I am more your friend than to take you at your word. And what do you think I am made of, to go from one man to another, like that?"

"Take your time, sweetheart; only give me your hand."

"George," said Mercy, very gravely, "I am beholden to you; but my duty it lies another way. There is a young man in these parts (Sir George groaned) that was my follower for two years and better. I wronged him for one I never name now. I must marry that poor lad, and make him happy, or else live and die as I am."

Sir George turned pale. "One word: do you love him?"

"I have a regard for him."

"Do you love him?"

"Hardly. But I wronged him, and I owe him amends. I shall pay my debt."

Sir George bowed, and retired sick at heart, and deeply mortified. Mercy looked after him and sighed.

Next day, as he walked disconsolate up and down, she came to him and gave him her hand. "You were a good friend to me that bitter day," said she. "Now let me be yours. Do not bide here: 'twill but vex you."

"I am going, madam," said Sir George, stiffly. "I but wait to see the man you prefer to me. If he is not too unworthy of you, I'll go; and trouble you no more. I have learned his name."

Mercy blushed: for she knew Paul Carrick would bear no comparison with George Neville.

The next day Sir George took leave to observe that this Paul Carrick did not seem to appreciate her preference so highly as he ought. "I understand he has never been here."

Mercy coloured, but made no reply: and Sir George was sorry he had taunted her. He followed her about, and showed her great attention, but not a word of love.

There were fine trout streams in the neighbourhood, and he busied himself fishing, and in the evening read aloud to Mercy, and waited to see Paul Carrick.

Paul never came; and, from a word Mercy let drop, he saw that she was mortified. Then, being no tyro in love, he told her he had business in Lancaster, and must leave her for a few days. But he would return, and by that time perhaps Paul Carrick would be visible.

Now his main object was to try the effect of correspondence.

Every day he sent her a long love-letter from Lancaster.

Paul Carrick, who, in absenting himself for a time, had acted upon his sister's advice rather than his own natural impulse, learned that Mercy received a letter every day. This was a thing unheard of in that parish.

So then Paul defied his sister's advice, and presented himself to Mercy; when the following dialogue took place :-

"Welcome home, Mercy."

"Thank you, Paul."

"Well, I'm single still, lass."

"So I hear."

"I'm come to say, let bygones be bygones."

"So be it," said Mercy, drily.

"You have tried a gentleman; now try a farrier."

"I have; and he did not stand the test."

"Anan."



“Why did you not come near me for ten days?”

Paul blushed up to the eyes. “Well,” said he, “I’ll tell you the truth. ’Twas our Jess advised me to leave you quiet just at first.”

“Ay, ay. I was to be humbled, and made to smart for my fault; and then I should be thankful to take you. My lad, if ever you should be really in love, take a friend’s advice; listen to your own heart, and not to shallow advisers. You have mortified a poor sorrowful creature who was going to make a sacrifice for you, and you have lost her for ever.”

“What d’ye mean?”

“I mean that ye are to think no more of Mercy Vint.”

“Then it is true, ye jade; ye’ve gotten a fresh lover already.”

“Say no more [than you know. If you were the only man on earth I would not wed you, Paul Carrick.”

Paul Carrick retired home, and blew up his sister ; and told her that she had “gotten him the sack again.”

The next day Sir George came back from Lancaster, and Mercy lowered her lashes for once at sight of him.

“Well,” said he, “has this Carrick shown a sense of your goodness?”

“He has come,—and gone.”

She then, with her usual frankness, told him what had passed. “And,” said she, with a smile, “you are partly to blame ; for how could I help comparing your behaviour to me with his? *You* came to my side when I was in trouble, and showed me respect when I expected scorn from all the world. A friend in need is a friend indeed.”

“Reward me, reward me !” said Sir George, gaily ; “you know the way.”

“Nay, but I am too much *your* friend,” said Mercy.

“Be less my friend, then, and more my darling.”

He pressed her, he urged her, he stuck to her, he pestered her.

She snubbed, and evaded, and parried, and liked him all the better for his pestering her.

At last, one day, she said, “If Mrs. Gaunt thinks it will be for your happiness, I *will*—in six months’ time ; but you shall not marry in haste to repent at leisure. And I must have time to learn two things—whether you can be constant to a simple woman like me, and whether I can love again as tenderly as you deserve to be loved.”

All his endeavours to shake this determination were vain. Mercy Vint had a terrible deal of quiet resolution.

He retired to Cumberland, and in a long letter, asked Mrs. Gaunt’s advice. She replied characteristically. She began very soberly to say that she should be the last to advise a marriage

between persons of different conditions in life. "But then," said she, "this Mercy is altogether an exception. If a flower grows on a dunghill, 'tis still a flower, and not a part of the dunghill. She has the essence of gentility, and indeed her *manners* are better bred than most of our ladies. There is too much affectation abroad, and that is your true vulgarity. Tack 'my lady' on to 'Mercy Vint,' and that dignified and quiet simplicity of hers will carry her with credit through every court in Europe. Then think of her virtues—(here the writer began to lose her temper)—where can you hope to find such another? she is a moral genius, and acts well, no matter under what temptation, as surely as Claude and Raphael paint well. Why, sir, what do you seek in a wife? Wealth? title? family? But you possess them already; you want something in addition that will make you happy. Well, take that angelic goodness into your house, and you will

find, by your own absolute happiness, how ill your neighbours have wived. For my part I see but one objection: the child. Well, if you are man enough to take the mother, I am woman enough to take the babe. In one word, he who has the sense to fall in love with such an angel, and has not the sense to marry it, if he can, is a fool."

"Postscript—My poor friend, to what end think you I sent you down in the coach with her?"

Sir George, thus advised, acted as he would have done had the advice been just the opposite.

He sent Mercy a love-letter by every post, and he often received one in return; only his were passionate, and hers gentle and affectionate.

But one day came a letter that was a mere cry of distress.

"George; my child is dying. What shall I do?"

He mounted his horse, and rode to her.

He came too late. The little boy had died suddenly of croup, and was to be buried next morning.

The poor mother received him upstairs, and her grief was terrible. She clung sobbing to him, and could not be comforted. Yet she felt his coming. But a mother's anguish overpowered all.

Crushed by this fearful blow, her strength gave way for a time, and she clung to George Neville, and told him she had nothing left but him, and one day implored him not to die and leave her.

Sir George said all he could think of to comfort her; and at the end of a fortnight persuaded her to leave the "Packhorse" and England, as his wife.

She had little power to resist now; and indeed little inclination.

They were married by special licence, and spent a twelvemonth abroad.

At the end of that time they returned to Neville's Court, and Mercy took her place there

with the same dignified simplicity that had adorned her in a humbler station.

Sir George had given her no lessons ; but she had observed closely, for his sake ; and being already well educated, and very quick and docile, she seldom made him blush except with pride.

They were the happiest pair in Cumberland. Her merciful nature now found a larger field for its exercise, and, backed by her husband's purse, she became the Lady Bountiful of the parish and the county.

The day after she reached Neville's Court came an exquisite letter to her from Mrs. Gaunt. She sent an affectionate reply.

But the Gaunts and the Nevilles did not meet in society.

Sir George Neville and Mrs. Gaunt, being both singularly brave and haughty people, rather despised this arrangement.

But it seems that, one day, when they were all

four in the Town Hall, folk whispered and looked ; and both Griffith Gaunt and Lady Neville surprised these glances, and determined, by one impulse, it should never happen again. Hence it was quite understood that the Nevilles and the Gaunts were not to be asked to the same party or ball.

The wives, however, corresponded, and Lady Neville easily induced Mrs. Gaunt to co-operate with her in her benevolent acts, especially in saving young women, who had been betrayed, from sinking deeper.

Living a good many miles apart, Lady Neville could send her stray sheep to service near Mrs. Gaunt ; and *vice versâ* ; and so, merciful, but discriminating, they saved many a poor girl who had been weak, not wicked.

So then, though they could not eat nor dance together in earthly mansions, they could do good together ; and, methinks, in the eternal world, where years of social intercourse will prove less



than cobwebs, these their joint acts of mercy will be links of a bright, strong chain, to bind their souls in everlasting amity.

It was a remarkable circumstance, that the one child of Lady Neville's unhappy marriage died, but her nine children by Sir George all grew to goodly men and women. That branch of the Nevilles became remarkable for high principle and good sense; and this they owe to Mercy Vint, and to Sir George's courage in marrying her. This Mercy was granddaughter to one of Cromwell's ironsides, and brought her rare personal merit into their house, and also the best blood of the old Puritans, than which there is no blood in Europe more rich in male courage, female chastity, and all the virtues.

THE END.







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